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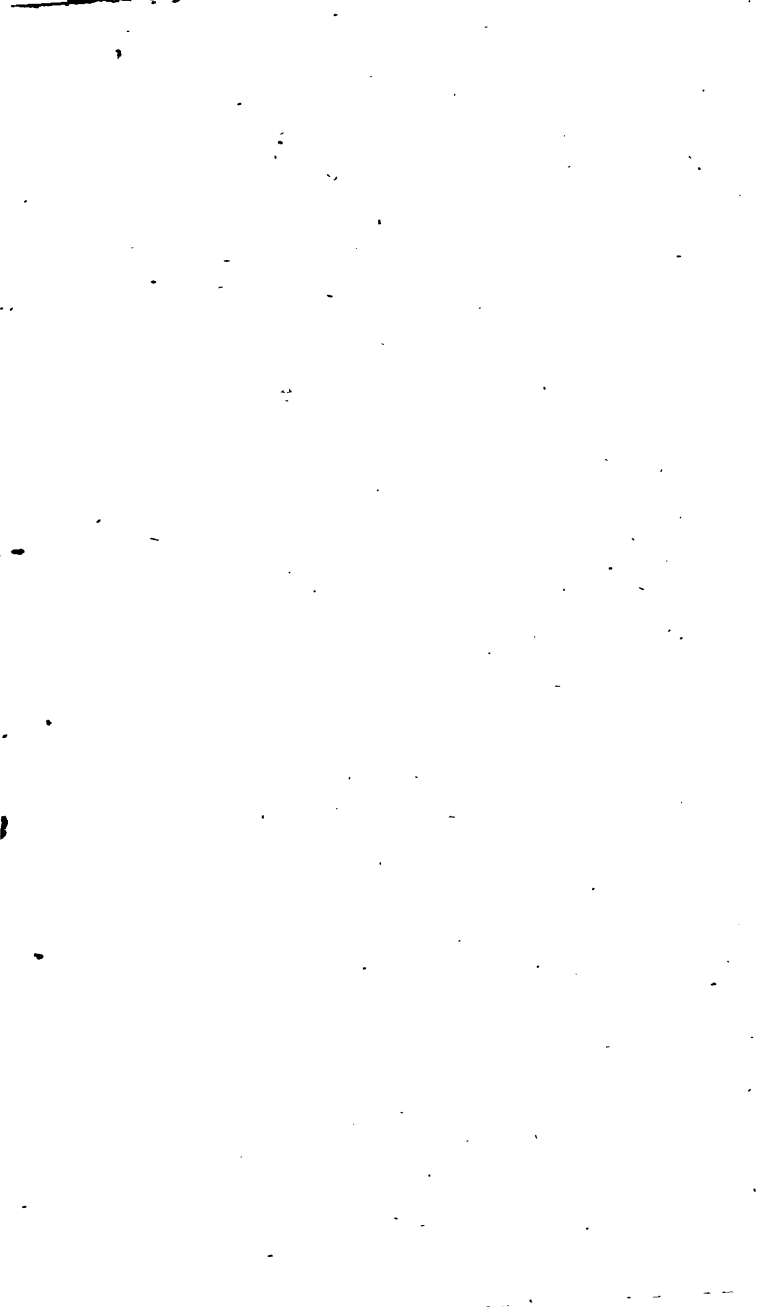


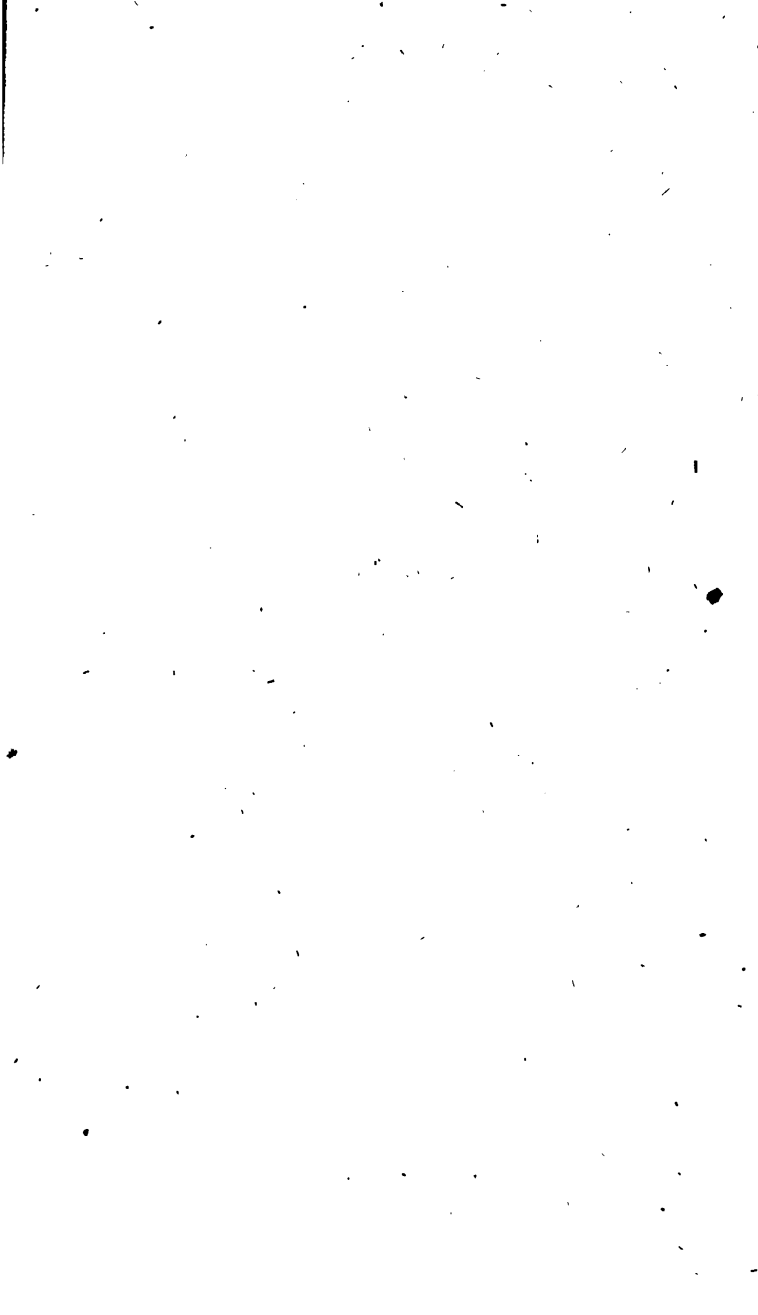
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THE

M. Inoué

PEASANT

OF

ARDENNE FOREST:

A NOVEL.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

By *Mrs. PARSONS,*

AUTHOR OF

ANECDOTES OF TWO WELL-KNOWN FAMILIES
THE MISER, THE VALLEY OF ST. GOTHARD,
AN OLD FRIEND WITH A NEW FACE,
WOMAN AS SHE SHOULD BE,
MYSTERIOUS WARNING, &c.

"Hereditary honour in worldly estimation is accounted the most noble; but reason and sound judgment speaketh in favour of him who hath acquired distinction by his *merit*; for 'tis *virtue*, and not *birth*, which maketh men truly noble:—And poor is his boast, who is compelled to *derrow* his claims to respect from a long list of titled ancestors."

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1801.



THE
PEASANT
OF
ARDENNE FOREST.

CHAP. XXIV.

TO account for the sudden, and little desired appearance of Lord E. we must acquaint our readers, that he had not got from his house a hundred yards before he unexpectedly met with Earl Belfont, that instant arrived in town. Whilst speaking to him, and telling the business he had gone through, with his intended visit to him, he saw Eleonora get into her carriage, some small

hand baskets put in, and a trunk fixed behind. "Already going to Richmond," thought he;—and presently the carriage drove off in a contrary direction. In the same moment it recurred to him her eager desire that he should leave her, and go on a visit perfectly indifferent to himself. On her principles of honour, or constancy, he could have no reliance; following therefore the impulse of the moment, he took a hasty leave of his friend, and returned to the house he had quitted; and there interrogated the servants.

The house Eleanora had taken for her private retreat was entirely unknown to her domestics, except the Italians in her own suite; and but for that same little blind god who ruled her destiny, Lord E. would have gained no information from the servants to have cured or confirmed his jealousy.—Unfortunately for her, her *favourite groom of the chambers*, observing that some part
of

of his influence was lost, stimulated equally by revenge and inclination, had lately paid his devoirs to one of the house-maids; and though he was largely bribed to keep the secrets of his lady, he was not so ungallant as to conceal any thing from the sultana of his heart.

Sebastian had, the preceding evening, whispered to Ann, the history of the snug little retreat to which he was obliged to attend his mistress, with every circumstance relative to Lewis, whom he execrated as the cause which deprived him of being with his dear Ann. Though the fellow spake English very indifferently, yet love rendered him intelligent, and eloquent enough to make his mistress comprehend the ground work of the business; and she asked him why he did not let the prisoner escape, and then they would of course come back again. He answered, "in the first place, his lady was as vigilant as the

devil; in the next, that she paid well for his services; and lastly, that the poor fellow could pay nothing, for he was nobody, without fortune or friends—and therefore he must for the present sacrifice his love to his interest, and fix his lady mistress under a *certain contribution* to him, before he got rid of the prisoner.”

Now it happened that Ann was not so resigned to wait for a combination of circumstances to ensure the fortune of her lover—she knew he was not badly off, and concluded the knowledge of his lady’s secrets would always be a fund to draw upon, even if he left her. In this disposition, she saw him depart with great reluctance, and some discontent festering on her heart, when Lord E’s. quick return, and the hasty questions he put to the servants, at once determined her to serve her love, and not injure her lover. She seized a moment to make a private signal, unobserved by
the

the others, and retired to her lady's dressing room; he quickly followed, and under a promise of strict secrecy relative to her information, and a reward of five guineas, his Lordship obtained all the intelligence he wished for, and more than he liked.—He hastened back to his own house, called for his groom, ordered his horse, and, fired by rage, jealousy, and indignation, he followed his faithless Eleanora within two hours after she had left town.

To convey any idea of *her* astonishment, confusion, and vexation, is altogether impossible—she stood fixed, immovable, and speechless. “I come, Madam,” said he, endeavouring to stifle his rage, “to share with you in the fatigue of attending a beloved object, who is so very ungallant as to receive you in his bed.”

“Ah! poor Douglas!” exclaimed Lewis, starting up, “are you come to upbraid me?”

—You think me base and ungrateful, but I was carried off—even Hermine could not save me.—No, no, she will hate and despise me;—but save yourself, that woman will stab you to the heart!—Begone, begone, save yourself!” exclaimed he, more wildly.

“Why what is all this,” cried Lord E. advancing to the bed, “is the young man mad?” The violent emotions, and contrariety of passions that all at once overpowered Eleanora, she could no longer support, but with a faint groan sank on the floor. Lord E. rang and called for help—two servants rushed in, who endeavoured to recover her, whilst his attention was more immediately directed to Lewis, who now lay panting and silent. When Eleanora gave signs of life, she was conveyed by his order to another apartment, and he sent off his own servant for medical assistance. The whole scene appeared to him

him like a mysterious dream, but the situation and exclamations of Lewis very greatly interested both his humanity and curiosity.

Lord E. though quite a man of the world in every fashionable folly, was by no means deficient in many amiable traits of character. Young, independent, and volatile, he easily slid into all the dissipations of the gay world, and entered with avidity into that dull round of, what is falsely called, pleasures, for murdering time and wasting his fortune, simply because he could not take the trouble to form better resolutions; or if he did sometimes *form them*, it required more fortitude and exertion than he was master of, to support them against the persuasions and example of his fashionable companions. He therefore followed the lead of the gay circle, was a gambler, a staunch better at Newmarket, a well known character at every

public assembly, and had just, as he thought, stamped his consequence, unrivalled by his compeers, in being the avowed protector of the beautiful Italian Countess.

With all these follies he had many dormant virtues that were lost in the vortex of fashion. — Generosity, humanity, and benevolence dwelt in his heart, but he had neither time nor opportunity to display them in the circle he lived in; and when he entered the apartment where he found Eleanora and Lewis, jealousy, rage, and resentment were struggling to overcome reason and prudence. The appearance and expressions of the youth surprised and affected him—he was shocked at the disorder of Eleanora, but still he felt more interested to develop the mysterious circumstances relative to Lewis, than to follow the woman he was attached to. — He was soon informed that Eleanora was restored to life, and would see him in half
an

an hour;—also that she had ordered a servant to bring a physician. Lewis lay tolerably composed, but when he spake it was addressing Lord E. as Mr. Douglas, and urging him to fly from the wicked arts of Eleanora. His Lordship sat quietly by the bed, attending to the incoherencies he frequently uttered, and soothing him in return; when the entrance of the physician he had sent for, and a summons from Eleanora came together. He requested the former to do all he could for his patient, and not to leave him till his return;—he then repaired to the chamber of Eleanora.

She had just left the bed, and was sitting thoughtfully in an arm chair. Possibly he looked haughty and resentful, for she observed, “ I see you feel very proud and resentful, but spare your reproaches, for I no longer intend to deceive you. That young man in the next apartment I have long loved,—only *him* ever had power to-

touch my heart, but a combination of circumstances kept him *ignorant* of my attachment. He has lately arrived in England, and the circumstances I allude to, have unhappily prejudiced him *against me*. By stratagem I brought him here, but, wretch as I am, I have punished him till a fever has deprived him of his reason. If his health and senses are not restored, I shall be miserable;—but if recovered for a detested rival, whoever she may be, she shall satiate my vengeance, and dearly pay me for *his scorn*.”

“ Is this all you have to say to me, Madam,” asked Lord E. rising up. “ No,” answered she, “ I will candidly tell you, that since all is discovered, our connexion must end here, for my whole heart is fixed on this young man;—he must be mine, or he shall perish, though *I* should follow him the next moment. Your Lordship, therefore is free—our acquaintance ceases,
and

and untroubled mistress of my own actions, *your* reproaches or regrets will be as fruitless, as to me perfectly indifferent and unavailing."

"You will not be troubled with either, Madam, I feel too much contempt for your character to have any regrets, and I disdain to reproach a woman I despise."

"You will then leave this house *instantly*, if you please, for the mistress of it desires to see you no more." "No, *I do not please*, Madam, I shall return to the next apartment, where a physician waits by my orders."

"By *your orders!*" exclaimed she, starting up. He pulled the door after him, and the key being on the outside, he turned it in the lock, and took it with him. Her shrieks and violent exclamations brought up her domestics, three men and two women. She ordered them to break open the door,

door, they applied to his Lordship. "Beware what you do," said he, "you are already open to the laws, by bringing here a young man, and keeping him by force, in consequence of which he is deranged, and may possibly die. I would advise those immediately concerned to leave the house, as probably officers of justice will soon be here. Whoever chooses to claim my protection, may go to my house in town, and order my men servants to come here immediately."

The three Italians instantly availed themselves of the offer,—they saw the reign of their mistress was ended,—they dreaded an English Lord, and the laws of a strange country. Without a shew of reluctance they thanked his Lordship, and without any scruple left their Lady to the consequences of her own proceedings. When he found they had really quitted the house, and no man servant remained but his own, he gave up

up the key to the women, and bade them take care of their Lady. They found her in hysteric fits, occasioned by the violence of her rage, and when she was recovered, she was so ill and exhausted as to be incapable of making any further resistance or exclamations.

Mean time Lord E. had repaired to Lewis's apartment, the physicians gave him hope that an opiate and proper treatment would soon have beneficial effects. "Can he be removed?" asked he. "I think he may by placing a feather bed in a carriage." "Well, then," returned his Lordship, "it shall be done without delay.— Though a stranger to me, I feel much interested for him, and he shall be taken to my house."

Not to be minute, a carriage was procured, the invalid placed in it, and Lewis was safely in bed at Lord E's. house, in
Cavendish

Cavendish Square, before the wretched Eleanora was sufficiently recovered to be informed of the revolution that had passed during the few last hours. But when she understood the whole of her misfortunes—the desertion of her servants, and the carrying off of Lewis, no language can give an idea of her rage and violence. She swore with bitter imprecations, destruction on Lord E. and Lewis, though she should perish in the attempt.

Passion gave her temporary strength, and having sent her servant to hire a carriage, she threw herself into it, and nearly half dead with fatigue of body, and anguish of mind, she arrived at her house most unexpectedly, when, as the chaise drew up, the first objects that met her eye were Sebastian and Ann sitting in the hall window. If she was shocked at seeing her favourite servant who had been base enough to leave her to the mercy of Lord E. thus

thus composedly familiar with a menial servant girl,—they would scarcely have been more terrified by the appearance of a ghost, than on beholding the head of their mistress, fury flashing from her eyes, sternly looking through the glass, which she let down with great violence when the chaise stopt. Astonished, and at a loss how to act, when the post-boy thundered at the door, he ran hastily to open it, and assist his Lady. This eager attention partly disarmed her anger, and her great weakness rendered his assistance very requisite.

“ Coward, ungrateful!” she exclaimed, but she had strength for no more, for the moment she was placed on a sofa, she fainted. The terrible agitations of her mind, the forced exertions she had made, had their concomitant effects on her body, and before night she had violent spasms in her side, that were of the most threatening complexion; so that Sebastian thought it
right

right to acquaint Lord E. with her situation. His Lordship had no sooner ordered every accommodation for Lewis, than he resolved to call in and discharge all his debts; for the ungenerous rapacity of Eleonora recurred to him, and he had no doubt but that she had shamefully involved him.

Lord E's. attachment was at first more an admiration of her beauty, and the vanity of being her protector, than any real tenderness; but she had insensibly gained ground on his heart, and but for this timely discovery, in all probability would soon have established an uncontrouled dominion over him. It was not without a pang that he found himself compelled to give her up for ever, but the curiosity and interest he felt about this unknown young man, served to divert his thoughts, and enabled him to stifle those regrets he found it difficult to repress.

On

On returning to his house he was informed of Eleanora's coming to town, and extreme illness.—He could not hear it without emotion, and sent immediately for his own physician to attend her. Lewis was happily in a profound sleep, from the salutary effects of which, the doctor entertained great hopes of his amendment.

His Lordship then ordered the Italian servants of his *ci-devant* Sultana, before him. Sebastian was not among them;—he had stopped on the way, they said, to see Ann, the house-maid; but without any scruple, and unasked they related every secret with which they had been entrusted.—They had too much selfishness and cunning to abide by the fallen fortunes of their Lady; and dreading the laws of which they were ignorant, and the power of an English nobleman, which they had early learnt to respect, they not only answered

answered freely to every question, but volunteered information relative to her attachment to Sebastian, that equally surprised and disgusted Lord E. and helped wonderfully to eradicate every remaining spark of love and affection that had lingered in his bosom.

The old adage, that, "However we may love the treason, we despise the traitor," was here verified. Lord E. saw through the selfishness and ingratitude of these servants, in the voluntary accusation of their mistress; and therefore could not retain them in his suite. But he gave to each sufficient for their support for three months in England, with an offer of paying their expences should they wish to return to Florence.

They accepted this offer, only observing they must go to the house of Eleanora for their clothes, &c. He answered, "that
they

they might go where they liked—as to that lady, he should never see her more, and they should take a line to her from him.” They trembled — they hoped, humbly hoped, his Lordship would not tell her what they had related.—“ No,” he replied, “ he could scarce justify to himself, the meanness of having interrogated servants to betray the secrets of their mistress, had it not been on the account of Lewis, he would have scorned the communication—they had nothing to fear from him.” He then wrote a few lines to tell her, “ she was welcome to the house, furniture, plate, &c. which his folly and prodigality had bestowed on her; and he contentedly submitted to pay the penalty of the bonds she had against him, as a just punishment for his credulity and misplaced confidence.” Of Lewis he said nothing; and this note he ordered them to give to the physician, who would cause it to be delivered whenever he thought proper.

In

In the evening of this busy day, Lord E. was informed that Lewis was better, the fever greatly abated by some hours of refreshing sleep, and that he lay very composed. In the morning of the following day, the physician waited upon his Lordship to inform him, that the dangerous symptoms had abated in Eleanora also; in consequence of which he had delivered the note, which she read, and tossed from her with a smile of contempt.—“Tell Lord E.” said she, “that he gives me nothing but what is already my own.—I acknowledge no obligations, and am perfectly indifferent as to his sentiments of me;—but I would advise him to dread the resentment he presumes to provoke—he has robbed me of what is dearer to me than life.—If he regards his own safety, let him resign the rash charge he has taken upon himself, or tremble for the consequence. I have gone too far to recede, and have made up my mind on this subject so decidedly, that
my

my life or death depend on the event—
and not mine alone!”

“What is to be done with this violent woman?” asked Lord E. “I know not indeed,” answered the doctor. “She has discharged me from all further attendance the moment she understood I was sent by your Lordship. Her passions are so outrageous that she is constantly in danger of a relapse, for these spasms are brought on by violent emotions.” “I believe her very capable of committing any excess, prompted by passion or revenge,” returned Lord E. “she is certainly a very dangerous creature; but till I know something more of this young man, I cannot withdraw my protection from him. I find it is only Sebastian, her confidential servant, that is acquainted with his name and circumstances; and that fellow, though he engaged to be here, has never shewn his face.”

Sebastian,

Sebastian, we have seen, had in his way to Lord E's. house called in on Ann, to acquaint her with what had ensued from the watchful jealousy of his Lordship, who had surprised them at North-End. Ann permitted him to believe that Lord E. had watched them, keeping her own counsel and her five guineas to herself. They were consulting which would be most for their advantage, to oblige his Lordship or remain with their mistress. Sebastian *did* feel a little attachment to her, he well knew she had still largely in her power to reward his services.—He had no great predilection for the English—fear of the laws, with which his Lordship threatened them, had in the moment of terror impelled him to submit to his commands; but on reflection, he could not expect much favour from him, and he knew that English servants disliked foreign ones. Undecided, he met Ann, and after much pro and con, they

they had not determined, when Eleanora so unexpectedly arrived.

Her presence and illness turned the scale, the balance was in her favour;—if she lived, she would be grateful no doubt for their attachment—if she died, no one but Sebastian knew where her property was, or the amount of it,—they resolved therefore to abide the event. Lord E. unacquainted with all these interested motives, believed that fear of the discovery, which actually had taken place, of his standing high in the good graces of his lady, was the sole cause of his disappearance; and having now as much information as he wished for respecting Eleanora, he gave the fellow to the devil, and waited for the convalescence of Lewis to obtain further particulars.

Mean time the ci-devant Countess, whose passions, naturally violent, had risen
almost

almost to a degree of frenzy, who, for the first time in her life, had conceived a most fervent attachment for Lewis, and had flattered herself that the seducing charms of her person, the fortune she possessed, and the blandishments of love, would, altogether, allure the affections, and gratify the vanity of a low born, obscure young man, maddened by her disappointment, indignant and revengeful against Lord E. tormented by curiosity and jealousy to know who, and where, was the hateful Hermine he had so tenderly called upon, and to whom no doubt was owing the repulsive coldness he had shewn towards her, — all these variety of conflicting passions were too powerful for the body to sustain. The spasms in her side, the oppressions of her breath returned with more alarming violence, the fever raged unceasingly — and in short, not to dwell on the subject, in four days she was reduced to the last extremity.

One

One of her English servants intimate with the domestics of Lord E. brought the intelligence of her extreme danger, and of her incessant desire to see Lewis before she died. This woman had accidentally been left with her about ten minutes, for Sebastian and Ann kept constant watch, to the exclusion of every other servant, till this day, when she was so extremely low, they thought fit to relax for a short time on some particular business, in which the one would not trust the other alone. The miserable Eleanora faintly expressed her ardent wish to see Lewis, or if not him, she would see Lord E. The woman told her she was acquainted in the family, and would go to the house without delay. Lewis was then in a convalescent state, but by no means capable of going out, or bearing any exertion of body, or trouble of the mind. Lord E. therefore, though a good deal agitated, undertook to comply with her wishes. His coming was so wholly un-

looked for, that no precautions had been taken against his admittance;—he obtained an easy entrance, and was conducted up stairs by the woman who had been at his house, even to the dressing room that adjoined the sick chamber.

She then went boldly into the room, and announced Lord E. The astonishment and terror of the faithful guards cannot be described, “Lord E!” they both exclaimed. “Oh, let him come in,” said Eleanora, in a feeble voice, and before the others could rise from their chairs, his Lordship entered. Casting a stern glance on them he advanced to the bed-side, and held out his hand;—he could not without extreme and visible emotion, behold the woman he had loved, thus altered in a few days. She did not accept his hand, nor for a moment could she speak more than “Sit down, my Lord.” He obeyed, then looking on the trembling pair, “You may withdraw,”

withdraw," said he. "No, my Lord," answered the man, a little recovered, "our duty keeps us here." "Leave the room," said Eleanora, "wait without till you are called for." With spite in their faces, and malice in their hearts, they withdrew, but no farther off than the outside of the door.

"Berthier then is very ill," said Eleanora, "or he will not come." "He is not well enough to bear any fatigue," answered Lord E. "but he is progressively getting better." He requested me to convey his sincere wishes for your recovery and future happiness." "Are you sincere," said she with earnestness, "did he really send that message?" "Upon my honour he did, the poor youth, I believe is incapable of malice or resentment." "A peasant, a low born wood-cutter!" returned she, "yet ah, how amiable he is! But 'tis my miserable fate to fall a victim to this obscure forester;—I had struggled against

my passion, and thought it subdued, till he arrived in London, then it gained the mastery over pride, ambition, and interest. You, oh, how I hate you for it;—You came, you have undone me!—but for your officiousness, my tender cares, in his illness, might have won his heart;—all now is over!” She sighed bitterly and turned her head from him.

Lord E. was extremely moved.—“Do not blame me,” said he, “for I believe the young man owes his life to that assistance I procured for him, and the ease of his mind. *You, Eleanora*, do not want for fortitude or strength of mind, exert yourself and you may recover.” “Recover,” repeated she, “recover, and for what? To be despised by a being my soul disdains, though I would suffer unheard of tortures to possess his affection.—Recover, to be sacrificed to a rival, to swell her triumph! Oh, that I knew her, that I could have
that

that hated—envied object before me;—she should satiate my vengeance!”

“ I must leave you,” said his Lordship, rising, “ if you only desired to have me a witness to sentiments and exclamations unworthy of your sex, I must leave you.”—“ Stop, stop,” she cried, “ allow for my weakness as a woman, for my passion as a despised—rejected person, though still in the bloom of youth and beauty;—and by whom despised? A peasant! Oh, I could tear my flesh at my mean infatuation! Stop, I beseech you, whilst I am thus capable of exertion, ’tis the effort of desperation. I would make my will, I will force that cold marble-hearted peasant to feel himself obliged to me.—Even if I recover, he shall in spite of himself, regret the woman he destroys. Send for a lawyer directly, while I have my senses.”

She was so urgent that he was obliged to comply. His own servant who was in waiting, was dispatched on the errand to his own man of business. In the interim she had relapsed into pain and extreme weakness. When the attorney arrived, Lord E. would have had it deferred, but she insisted upon his proceeding, all her servants were called up.—She ordered every one a year's wages.—To Sebastian she bequeathed the sum of two thousand pounds, English, with three hundred more to support him till his return to his native country.

To each of her Italian servants the same sum to pay for their journey, besides the year's wages. — The house she had at North-End, with the furniture, she also left to Sebastian, to dispose of as he pleased.— The residue of her fortune, both in the English and Italian funds, which she supposed to be more than fifteen thousand pounds, with her bonds, plate, jewels, &c. she

she bequeathed to Lewis Berthier. No words can express the disappointment and vexation of Sebastian and Ann, who had promised to themselves the whole of this fortune.

The first seemed inclined to dispute her power of making a will under occasional fits of insanity, but Lord E. with an air of great authority commanded his silence. "Peace!" said Eleanora, "*you* have no cause to be dissatisfied, I know you have taken care of yourself.—And now," added she, exultingly, "that mean, yet proud-hearted peasant, *must* acknowledge himself overpaid for his temporary confinement, and at least obliged by an affection that outlives death." She desired two copies to be made, one deposited with Lord E. another with herself, and the original with the lawyer.

His Lordship soon after took his leave, without any of that emotion he had felt on

his entrance; for she had so strongly exerted herself, that he really believed she was far from being in a dangerous state, but rather that she had some points in view—some private schemes to answer, by this shew of uncommon affection and generosity towards Berthier—and he hesitated some time, undecided whether he should inform him of this will or not. As yet he had held no particular conversation with him, from a delicate regard to his health, also to avoid the appearance of curiosity, as inconsistent with the duties of hospitality and benevolence. Eleanora had repeatedly declared, that his birth was mean, his employment a wood-cutter.—By what means he had fallen into company connected with her, or who Douglas was, to whom he had so frequently apostrophized when ill, he was very desirous of knowing, but still held back from asking any elucidation.

Mean

Mean time Lewis gaining strength, had been informed by the doctor the full extent of his obligations to Lord E. and each time his Lordship looked in upon him, he expected that he would take notice of the situation he had found him in, and enquire of his name and circumstances.—But the enquiry was not made, and every allusion to the past seemed to be studiously avoided. When Lord E. returned from Eleanora, he paid Lewis a visit; he found him up, dressed, and much better than he expected. Congratulating him on his convalescence, Lewis seized the opportunity to express some part of the warm sense he entertained of his Lordship's condescension and humanity.

“I know not, my Lord,” said he, “in what light I must appear to you, or what opinion you may have formed of my character and situation in life, under the circumstances in which you found me. Of the first it does not become me to speak

more, than with that justice the meanest individual owes to himself, that I trust my integrity is unquestionable. My birth is humble, the employment I was brought up to more mean than even my birth.—The partial kindness of a worthy man drew me from a laborious employment, and launched me into a world where I have found myself alone, ignorant, and unconnected. One respectable and amiable family have with peculiar kindness received and protected me, but could not make me happy, for a life of indolence and dependence neither suits my circumstances nor inclination.—And this respected family I fear, must long before this have cast me from their hearts as unworthy and ungrateful; for appearances, and the arts of a bad woman, if she told me truth, must have condemned me.”

“ May I ask the name of the family you allude to?—but do not satisfy me if you
have

have any desire to conceal it—I would not wish to give you pain by any enquiries of mine.” “Your Lordship is truly considerate and generous,” returned Lewis, “but I should be wholly inexcusable to have any concealments had I motives for such, which, thank Heaven, I have not; and if your Lordship has leisure, and will condescend to hear me, I will briefly relate my story—I feel quite able so to do.”

“Take your own time,” answered Lord E. “I shall attend to you with pleasure; and when you are fatigued, pray break off without ceremony, and consider the weak state of your health.” Lewis bowed respectfully, and after a moment’s pause began his little history; but as we are well acquainted with every particular he had to relate, we shall leave him to make his own interest with his Lordship, and proceed to matters of more consequence.

CH A P. XXV.



WE left Mr. Douglas and Fidelia proceeding on a visit to Lord Douglas, each anxious to conceal their own anguish, and divert the grief that they suspected silently preyed on the mind of the other.—The mutual endeavour was of service to both by the exertion it demanded; and with more composure than could be expected they arrived at Rose Vale, a small house his Lordship had removed to, in Hampshire, for the salubrity of the air, and its vicinity to Southampton and the Isle of Wight.

In

In early life these brothers had been much estranged from each other, by the absurd partiality of their parents; who were by no means congenial minds, and of course the children imbibed their improper and ill-judged prejudices. Lord Douglas had, on the death of his father, refused to see or assist his brother, who fortunately obtained better friends than cold relations. His Lordship had followed every pursuit that tended to destroy his constitution and dissipate his fortune. He had married a lady with a large estate, who died within three years after, and left no heirs to claim it. Again his Lordship launched on the world, and for some years was the hero of the race, and the chief buck in all frolics and excesses, until his health and constitution sank under continual indulgencies, and the gouty paroxisms were so frequent and violent that he actually became a cripple, unable to walk, and only capable of

of changing his apartment by being wheeled in a chair.

Thus cut off from pleasure and society, he began to think of his brother, whose situation in life was by no means disgraceful to his birth and connexions. — And it was soon after the late Mrs. Douglas had been first attacked by a paralytic affection, that his Lordship condescended to make overtures of reconciliation to his brother. The disposition of Mr. Douglas was of the most flexible nature—he retained not a particle of resentment in his heart, and as readily and cordially met the advances of his brother as if he had been the person to have given the offence. He paid him a short visit immediately, entered into all his family affairs, (except what related to Fidelia) and it was at his Lordship's request that he was desirous of sending his eldest son abroad to gain information, and acquire the polish of other nations,

nations, that he might dignify the rank of an English nobleman by manners as well as by fortune.

The sudden event of Fidelia's being acknowledged, and his consequent journey, was not communicated till after Mr. Douglas returned with her to England; and it was some time before he could assume courage and fortitude to enter on a story that so shamefully implicated his wife, and betrayed his own folly, weakness, and injustice. Lord Douglas was not a man of strong feelings, or great sensibility.—He was surprised, but not much affected—he cursed the pride and unnatural conduct of Mrs. Douglas, called his brother a fool for being led by the nose, and pitied the poor girl so long neglected, and so near being condemned to a life of purgatory on earth by a parcel of bigotted nuns and friars.—This was correspondent to his feelings—and after pitying the poor girl's sufferings, he

he gave them an invitation to Rose Vale, that he might see what sort of a being had been turned out from the tuition of a convent.

The ill-humour, causeless dislike, and cruel jealousy Mrs. Douglas entertained against her daughter, had impeded Fidelia from accepting the invitation; and that lady's death, the subsequent events, with the introduction of Eleanora into the house, had altogether so entirely engaged the time and ideas of Mr. Douglas, that his brother held but a slender share in his thoughts for some weeks; until the discovery, and consequent departure, of the *ci-devant* Countess, caused him to reflect on the duties he had neglected, and the dangers he had escaped.

Lord Douglas heard of his nephew's return to England so much out of health, with more concern than was common for
him;

him to feel on any occurrence—and the intelligence of his unexpected death, very deeply affected him both in body and mind. He had written to his brother, earnestly requesting that he might see him, as he believed he had not long to live, and wanted comfort and society. In this disposition, mutually afflicted, the brothers met, and with more feeling than had ever on any occasion betrayed itself on either side till now.

When Fidelia was introduced, his Lordship eyed her with surprise and pleasure—he warmly embraced her.—“What!” he exclaimed, “make a nun of a girl like this! by Heaven, I would send them old cants all to the devil first.—She is absolutely a little angel, fit to grace the side of a prince; and a handsome fortune I will give her too, and that without delay.” He began some very harsh reflections on Mrs. Douglas, which Fidelia interrupted; and

and then it changed into lamentations for poor Frederic, which overpowered them all, and for some time precluded every other subject.

His Lordship was the first to recover,—“Well,” said he, “’tis all as Providence thinks fit,—if you have lost a son, you have saved a daughter; though I must say, the death of my wife did not give me half the trouble that I felt for this last bitter stroke.—But thank God, one boy is yet left, and we must bear this loss as men and christians!—Fidelia, my dear, a very pretty name Fidelia is I think, you must now preside at my table.—It will soon be your own, I believe, for I can’t live long; and now I think of it, as I purchased this Rose Vale, I may give it as I like, so, my dear, I shall settle it upon you.”

Before Fidelia could reply the physician came in, and pronounced his Lordship to be

be much better than for many preceding days.—“Why you are right, I believe, doctor, for my spirits are cheered by the arrival of my brother and my niece.”

“I am really of opinion,” answered the doctor, “that the South of France, and cheerful company, might do much for your Lordship yet.” “What, will it set a cripple upon his legs again, or invigorate a worn-out constitution?”

“I don’t absolutely say that, but there is a chance that change of climate may prove very restorative.” “Very well, doctor, I see you are tired with attending me; but were I inclined to try, which is hardly worth while, I can’t go alone with servants only, cripple as I am.—What say you, brother, what say you, niece, will you——” “Dear brother,” said Mr. Douglas, interrupting him, “by all means be guided by the doctor’s advice; I can take

take upon me to say that Fidelia will be as happy as myself to attend you."

Fidelia joined in the assurance with an affectionate warmth that drew tears from the eyes of Lord Douglas.—"But," said he, "unable to walk, how shall I be conveyed on board ship?"—"That difficulty is soon obviated," returned the physician, "an easy accommodation may be found, 'tis frequently done for invalids like your Lordship. A lady I well know, lately returned from Montpellier, perfectly restored from a paralytic affection, who, when she left England was as helpless as you are."

"That may be, doctor, but I have played the devil with my constitution, which, I take it, is too much shattered to hope for any repair.—But however in such company I'll go, and that speedily, so, my good friends, make haste and arrange all your little affairs.—If *I* derive no benefit
from

from it, I am sure change of place and objects will be of service to you both,—so hey for the South of France, doctor.”

Every proper accommodation, to make his Lordship easy and comfortable, was soon provided. Mr. Douglas went to London for three days to settle some necessary business for himself and his daughter, in which time he again enquired about Lewis, without obtaining any satisfaction, and naturally inferred from his silence, that he had ungratefully forsaken them, and was fallen into the toils of a wicked woman, whose fascinations had corrupted his morals and depraved his heart.

Fidelia, in spite of every unfavorable circumstance, could not bring her heart to condemn him, tho' her reason justified her father's opinion,—she grieved for him but she could not reprobate him entirely.—She hoped, almost against conviction, and
would

would often mentally exclaim, "'Tis impossible that open ingenuous countenance, that unstudied candour, that goodness of heart that flowed spontaneous in his conduct towards Hermine, and my poor Frederic, could be the result of art and hypocrisy, nor could a good mind be so suddenly perverted.—No, 'tis impossible! there is a mystery hangs over his fate, but I cannot believe him guilty."

Such were the liberal sentiments of Fidelia, and indeed few who knew Lewis but must be prejudiced in his favour, from the sparkling intelligence in his eyes, and an air of candour that animated every feature. And little as this lovely girl had seen of him, he had made a strong impression on her mind to his advantage, which not all the subsequent unfavorable appearances could any ways eradicate. If she felt some little reluctance to leave England, uncertain of his fate, she felt much more from
the

the reflection that her beloved Hermine would probably arrive in London soon after she must quit it;—this was a truly painful consideration, but she strove to stifle her selfish regrets in the idea that she had the power to communicate pleasure and administer comfort to a kind and suffering relative.

On that very day when Lewis was released from his imprisonment, by the opportune appearance of Lord E. the Douglas family left England;—and in less than a week after, Lady Somerset and her party arrived safe in London.—But this event we must speak of in another place, and return to Lewis, who related his story in the most simple manner, speaking as humbly of himself as his worst enemies could have done. Lord E. was much pleased with his candid narrative, not less interested for him, and concerned that it fell to his lot to acquaint him with the death of poor
Frederic

Frederic Douglas. This event, tho' delivered with much kind caution, was a stroke Lewis was but ill calculated to bear, and the effect it had upon him gave great pain to Lord E. he fainted, and was obliged to be carried to his bed exceedingly ill.

Tho' Lewis had not exaggerated, or "set down aught in malice" against Eleanora, on the contrary, if he did not attempt to palliate her atrocities, he did not dwell on them, but mentioned them as lightly as he could, yet Lord E. heard sufficient to convince him that she was the most abandoned of women, and that whatever were her sufferings now, she was as wholly undeserving of pity, as she was unworthy of notice. When Lewis was restored to some degree of composure, his Lordship engaged to wait on Mr. Douglas, and explain to him the situation of his lost young friend;—and he took the opportunity of telling Lewis the state of Eleanora's health,

health, and the bequest she had made to him in her will. "Sooner, much sooner," cried Lewis, with all the energy he could exert, "would I return to the forest, and resume my humble occupation, and by my daily labour earn my daily bread, than accept of fortune and independence from the hands of a woman so detestable, whether alive or dead. She has murdered my unfortunate young friend as effectually as if by a sword or poison;—by her vile arts he most probably expired under the impression of my ingratitude and base desertion of him,—and shall I accept riches obtained by a series of wickedness,—by plunder, rapacity, and the most infamous conduct?—No, my Lord, I was born to labour, and when it pleases Heaven to restore my strength, I can by honest industry procure to myself content and independence.—Never, never, will I touch a penny of such ill-gotten wealth!"

“ I honour your integrity, and admire your disinterested independent spirit,” returned his Lordship, “ a mind like your’s is superior to fortune, and I trust will not need the bounty of Eleanora, to preserve you from returning to an employment wholly unworthy of you;—but more of this another day. I will devote this to any enquiries you are anxious to make—I will see Mr. Douglas. Is there any one else whose good opinion you are desirous to retain ?”

Lewis had passed over every thing relative to Lady Somerset or Hermine, from the time he had left the forest; delicately considering that he had no right to disclose the concerns of others, not immediately interwoven with his own. Thus questioned, he replied, “ I do, indeed, wish to know if Lady Somerset is returned to England ?” “ How !” said my Lord, “ are you known to Lady Somerset ?” “ I have that honour, my Lord, and her permission to wait on

on her, when she should arrive in London." "I am happy to hear it," returned he, "the *late* Lord Somerset was nearly related to my father,—the present is a very amiable young nobleman, I understand; but I know little of him personally, for as soon as he left college, he travelled thro' England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, to make himself acquainted with his own country, previous to visiting other nations. I occasionally went to the house, and take shame to myself in saying, that I neglected to cultivate the esteem of such valuable relatives, because they did not mix much with the gay circles of fashion, among which I became very early initiated. But if I did not court their acquaintance, I respected their characters, and admired the proper mode adopted for the information of Lord Somerset." His Lordship then asked, "By what means he became acquainted with Lady Somerset, for," con-

tinued he, "you did not name her in your little history?"

"It was accident," answered Lewis, "that threw me into the notice of her Ladyship, and there were particulars attending it, which I did not feel myself at liberty to relate, as they in no means were implicated with what concerned me." "I am pleased with your discretion," returned Lord E. "and you may rely that I will make the proper enquiries this day, and shall also report your fixed rejection of her intended legacy, to Eleanora, if you are decided and firm in your refusal of her favours." "Indeed I am," said Lewis, "so decided, that I would embrace the most cheerless poverty, rather than enjoy wealth so nefariously obtained." "Very well, keep up your spirits, you must not grieve or repine at the all-wise decrees of Providence;—those that die young, generally die happy.—Length of days but too often multiplies

multiplies our errors, and adds strength to our follies; of which you see in me a woeful example. Half ruined in my fortune by racing, my health impaired by midnight orgies, and my peace and reputation sacrificed to worthless women, and all this with my eyes open.—But it won't do to moralize now, so adieu;—compose yourself against my return."

When Lord E. called at the house of Mr. Douglas, he was concerned to hear they had so recently left England, without the satisfaction of hearing from Lewis.—Their return was uncertain, but all letters were to be sent to his banker's in Pall-Mall. From thence he proceeded to Lady Somerset's, and there learnt that the family were hourly expected. His next visit was a reluctant one to Eleanora. He was surprised to hear that she was at the last extremity, he heard that the physician was with her, and sent for him. "I am glad

your Lordship is come," said he, on his entering the room, "she is perfectly sensible, but drawing on apace, and extremely restless that you and your friend had not obeyed her summons." "I have received no summons," answered he. "How!" said the doctor, "it is three hours since I sent to Cavendish Square, and an answer was brought that you had company, but would come the moment you were at leisure." "Upon my honour," returned Lord E. "I am quite a stranger to any message, and of course could not send such a reply." "This must be enquired into, but pray come up." He followed the doctor, and beheld Eleanora to all appearance dying;—he would gladly have retreated but it was not possible. "You are come at last," said she, "where is Berthier—would he not accompany you?"—"He has not yet left his room," answered his Lordship, "but requested me to assure you that he is very sensible of your intended kindness,

kindness, in the donation you design for him;—but that he cannot accept it, and in short has made a solemn vow that he will never receive any legacy whatever.”

—“Ungrateful, cruel, vindictive monster!” cried she, “his soul as mean as his birth, is devoid of gratitude, tenderness, or pity.—I will hate him,—yes, I will hate him, detest, and punish him!” “Do not thus exhaust yourself,” said the physician. “Begone,” cried she, fiercely,—and to their extreme wonder and surprise, rising briskly from her pillow, “begone all of you,” she cried, “I want you not;—my scheme has not succeeded.—That insensible wretch has counteracted all my designs.—I will live for vengeance!—I have already imposed upon the vaunted skill of a physician, and the milky weakness of a British Senator;—but that obdurate, forest-born insolent, has defied my power;—he shall yet feel it.—Tell him to dread the rage of a despised woman. Begone hence

all of you! let me never see you more!" Without a single word, Lord E. and the physician quitted the room, their looks exchanged, spake their astonishment and horror. "Step into my carriage, pray, my Lord," said the doctor, seeing there was no other in waiting. "Thank Heaven," cried Lord E. as the coach drove from the door, "that we have escaped from that vile female machiavel." "I have not yet recovered from the greatest surprise and deception I ever met with," said the doctor. "By what arts she has contrived to vary her pulse and complexion, and appear writhed with agonies apparently insupportable, I am entirely at a loss to conceive; and now, even now, I think she deceives herself, and her exertion is a last effort, for assuredly she was very ill when I was first called in, after she refused the attendance of the gentleman your Lordship sent to her." "She certainly was ill then," replied Lord E. "but I confess I doubted
if

if she was so much reduced as she pretended yesterday; and her behaviour now strikes me with conviction that the will, and all that superabundant generosity towards my young friend, was a fabricated scheme to work upon his feelings, by drawing him to see her,—and she is such a Circe, that no man can possibly answer for his resolution, if once in her power.”

“You know her well, my Lord,” answered the physician, “and therefore I subscribe to your judgment; but whatever have been her plans, or the arts she has used, I am convinced her servants are as ignorant of them as we are. They certainly really believed her dying, and as a proof, ’tis evident they deceived her, in not taking a message to your house, to request as her last dying wish, to see you and Mr. Berthier.”

D. 5.

“That’s

“That’s true,” answered his Lordship; “they would scarcely have risked the discovery had they believed she would recover, or expected to see me. After all, I think it highly important to have her manœuvres enquired into—a woman servant of her’s is acquainted with some of my domestics, by which means we may gain some insight into what is passing there. She is a diabolical wretch, I will not degrade the sex so much as to call her woman; but such as she is, we may have every thing to fear from her revenge if she lives.” “Then your Lordship had best leave town.” “It was my intention to do so in a few days, but if Berthier can be removed we will go without delay.”

By this time they were arrived in Cavendish-Square; the physician having other visits to pay took leave, promising to call in the evening. Lord E. instantly enquired who was acquainted in Eleanora’s family,

family, and hearing it was one of the house-maids, he directed his housekeeper to send her there, and gain what information she could as to that lady's health and present proceedings.

Not one in the family but hated Eleonora; and consequently were all interested for the young man she had so cruelly used. With this disposition, Hannah, the house-maid, repaired to call upon her friend; who, not being in her lady's secrets, or partaking of the good things with which Sebastian regaled himself and his favourite Ann, a little jealousy, envy, and a natural love of prying into secrets, to have the pleasure of disclosing them, impelled her to glean every sort of information—and as she had that very day treasured up a budget-full, the visit of Hannah was well timed, and she gave her a hearty welcome.—“ Oh,” said she, “ such doings!—Lord bless me, such wickedness!—But come, come up to
my

my chamber softly, I have such a heap of things to tell you, that your very hair will stand an end to hear them."

Hannah naturally loved secrets too, and having such a double motive as to please her Lord and gratify herself, she readily crept silently up to the room, when shutting the door, the woman repeated every circumstance of Eleanora's illness the preceding day, the making of the will, &c.—“ But,” said she, “ what is worse than all, that foreign fellow, Sebastian, has well feathered *his nest*; for do you know I was up in my lady's dressing room putting things to rights, and was just opening a drawer or so, when I heard some one a coming, so a little flurried, I pops under the bed—and so then I hears that fellow take out keys and unlock my lady's cabinet, and presently hearing a jingle of money, I peeps under the valen, and sees him take papers and money, and the Lord knows what

what beside, and put them all into his pocket, and then he walked out of the room.—So I gets out, and wondered he hadn't opened the drawers too, for to be sure there's a deal of nice linen and laces there *now*—though I dares to say Madam Nan has been pretty free with it."

"Well, but how is your lady now?" asked Hannah. "Why, Lord help you, that's the very thing I was going to tell.—Here has been such fearful doings that frightened me out of my seven senses—for here, 'twas but this very morning, mistress was, as we all thought, going to die, and the doctor said, she was going fast; and methought Sebastian looked as proud as if he was to be lord of all. Well, then comes your Lord, and soon after we hears *such a rumpus*—my lady's voice, if you'll believe me, scolding like the deuce.—I runs up to the next room, there she was a calling names; and presently out bounces
my

my Lord and the doctor in a great flurry. Soon after down comes Sebastian, looking as glump as may be—he took our Nan aside, for she's in all his secrets, and there they whispered together; and I hears him say something about the diable, and cursed, and a heap of jargon I could not make out. But she said, "She must be a deceitful devil; and 'tis all along of some powders which she made me give her, from a small box I fetched from the cabinet." Just then the bell ringing they scampered off. And just now I hears she is got up and dressed."

"Well," says Hannah; "this is fine doings sure enough,—so she only sham'd sickness." "Oh, she was really mortal bad at first, with those things spalms, I believe they call 'em, in her side—then she grew better; but 'tis my belief sure enough, that it was all sham yesterday and to-day,

to-day, or she could never scold so loud, and be able to get up again."

Hannah joined in the same opinion; and then invited her friend to call to-morrow, "I shall long," said she, "to hear what is going on." "That you shall," answered the other, "for I'll keep a good look out, only that foreign fellow is as cunning as the devil.—I wonders what he'll do now with all the things he tookt out—as sure as fate, he thought her was dying, and so went to sarve himself."—Hannah now took leave, with a promise of having her visit returned the following day; and made her report at home to Mrs. Freeman, who repeated it to her Lord.

Lord E. had mean time communicated to Lewis the absence of the Douglas family, the expected return of Lady Somerset,—and lastly, his extraordinary interview with Eleanora. He was very
greatly

greatly concerned that he was impeded from an explanation with Mr. Douglas; and mortified as well as grieved, that they should have left England with an unfavourable opinion of him. The hope, and the joy that he felt in the prospect of seeing Hermine, was something damped by the strange conduct, and threatened vengeance of Eleanora, from whose violence and uncommon arts he had every thing to dread.

Nor was Lord E. without his apprehensions of her revenge, thus stimulated by love and disappointment. He was therefore anxious to leave London immediately, though he had no doubt but their steps would be watched—still at his country seat, surrounded by his own domestics, they would have less to fear from any plots and surprises than in London. He proposed to Lewis their instant departure. — “I feel much interest for you,” said he, “you must

must allow me to cultivate your acquaintance, and serve you to the best of my power. The conduct of this woman," added he, smiling, "has soberized me; I can think when I please, and the lesson that she has given to me, may prove of infinite importance. I can answer for nothing, because I confess my intentions are rarely carried into effect, and my good resolutions often fade away before persuasion and example—but, however, I am desirous to try if I can relish the country with a rational companion."

Lewis was fully sensible of this honour and kindness,—but to leave London when Hermine was hourly expected—what a struggle!—Yet, to stop against the wishes of Lord E. to hazard his repose from the schemes of Eleanora, and to pin himself as it were upon Lady Somerset, if he declined the generous offers of his new friend,—no, his pride revolted against that appearance.

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If our readers object to the word pride, as a feeling not becoming in a low-born peasant, we will call it principle;—whatever name we give it, it was to him an undefinable something that nature had implanted, and which had all the effects a dignified pride would have produced in the bosom of a nobleman. And this sentiment taught Lewis what he owed to himself and to Lord E. he therefore acknowledged his sense of the honour conferred upon him, and was ready to attend his Lordship's commands. The following day the best accommodations were arranged for the ease of Lewis, in the carriage, and Lord E. and his suite left town for Dorsetshire.

CHAP.

CHAP. XXVI.



IT is a long time since that we left Lady Somerset and her beautiful niece at Brussels, waiting for Lord Somerset, whose journey had been impeded by an accident he met with in jumping out of a carriage. At length, to the infinite delight of his affectionate mother, he arrived, and was introduced to his new found relative, whom he acknowledged with much tenderness and admiration. They proposed stopping another week in Brussels, that his Lordship might take a cursory view of the city and
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its environs, tho' their mutual impatience to return to England impeded a longer residence for the present.

We shall not dwell on any further occurrences, either in Brussels, or in the course of their journey, but set them quietly down in Portland-Place. It is proper, however, to notice, that in this interval of time, Lord Somerset became a passionate admirer of the lovely Hermine, and having no cause to conceal his sentiments or repress his feelings, his unqualified admiration could not pass unnoticed either by Hermine or his mother.

The latter was charmed by the discovery, it had been the first wish of her heart, from the moment she beheld her charming niece. On the choice of her son for a partner through life, she rightly judged much of his future happiness both here and hereafter, must eventually depend; and
often

often her maternal anxieties on this head had disturbed her repose. When, therefore, she beheld his growing attachment to the daughter of her ever-beloved sister,—a daughter so amiable, so formed to supply the place in her affections of the angel she had lost, her heart bounded with transport; she saw—she knew of no one impediment to the completion of her wishes.—Her dear niece was a stranger to the world, she could have no prepossession in favor of any one; and it was not in the nature of things that she could be insensible to the passion of such a man as Lord Somerset.

Her Ladyship had good grounds to form her opinion on, and draw her conclusion, for few young men, indeed, had better pretensions to expect a lady's preferable favour than Lord Somerset. His person was handsome, his manners elegant, which, with a fund of cheerfulness and a good temper, threw an air of fascination over his
form

form and conversation, that never failed to gain the esteem of those he was desirous to please. Hermine saw and acknowledged his merits, she was proud of, and delighted with her new cousin;—she really loved him too, with an affection that sought no disguise, for it was the proud love of a sister for a brother she thought truly amiable.

This open undisguised preference, whilst it delighted Lady Somerset, had a very different effect on his Lordship;—he knew, that in a delicate mind, love was timid and retiring,—that it gave birth to a variety of emotions in a female bosom that conscious sensibility, decorum, and feminine modesty studiously endeavoured to conceal, particularly from the observation of the beloved object. Hermine had a dignity of person and mind that convinced him, *her delicacy* would suppress those marks of avowed partiality and esteem, if she entertained any preferable regard,—any tenderness for him
beyond

beyond what their affinity might claim.— Thus reasoning from feeling and observation, his Lordship felt nothing of that exultation which seemed to brighten his mother's prospects; on the contrary, he rather shrank from her unqualified marks of esteem, and wished a thousand times that she said less and thought more;—that in the room of that blush of pleasure with which she received his attentions and compliments, he could have seen the downcast eye, the delicate confusion of an agitated heart, and the tenderness of that heart struggling to emerge from behind the veil modesty threw over it. “No,” said he, one evening, after much reflection, “no, Hermine partakes not in the fond preference of *my heart*;—she coldly regards me as a lover, tho’ warmly as a friend and relative,—but that sentiment will not satisfy me, I must be loved or I can never be happy. Yet why should I despair, why not indulge the flattering hope that time
and

and perseverance may give birth to that tender preference I wish for.—She has much delicacy and energy of mind, love may not spring spontaneous in her bosom, it must be implanted with care, and cultivated by observation and esteem;—let me then endeavour to *deserve* her heart, and I may possibly obtain it.” Such was the soliloquy of Lord Somerset; whilst his mother had no such draw-backs, from any apprehension of his success, but already anticipated the delights of that union which seemed to be the boundary of all her wishes.

The second day after their arrival in town, Lady Somerset sent a servant to the house of Mr. Douglas, with a note for Mr. Berthier;—and his Lordship having seen the card left by Lord E. rather surprised at a visit so seldom made, and so little expected, took a stroll down to Cavendish-Square, where he was informed that his Lordship had left town for Dorsetshire.

setshire. He was sauntering through the Square when he met Earl Belfont, with whom he had only a slight common-place acquaintance. After a compliment on his return to England, the Earl said, "You have been calling in at Lord E's." "I have, but find he has left town." "Poor fellow! he has been devilishly unlucky,—lost a confounded sum at Newmarket, and I hear has been cursedly tricked by his Italian Countess."

"I know nothing of his affairs," returned Lord Somerset, "tho' we are relatives, our families were never very intimate. On my return I found a card left a few days since at Lady Somerset's, which induced me to call at his house;—I am indeed sorry to hear he is still attached to Newmarket, as I have understood he has been a considerable sufferer by his taste."

"Why he has no chance against the very knowing ones;—it is more frolic and

fashion, than inclination or judgment that takes him there, I believe." "Then he is still less excusable," returned Lord Somerset. "To trifle away time and money without desire or gratification, is in my opinion the most contemptible of all pursuits, and such a mode of conduct as I should not expect in Lord E. for if I remember right, I have heard him spoken of as a very intelligent, well-educated, and accomplished nobleman."

"He certainly is a very clever fellow, but that has nothing to do with certain fashionable propensities which a man must fall in with, if he chooses to be a member of society." "I hope under the comprehensive term of society, there is no absolute necessity that a man must be a gambler, or have an Italian Countess in his suite, to be admitted as a citizen of the world.—If so, I am returned to my native country with
the

the prospect of being a solitary man, for *I* have not those fashionable propensities."

"All in good time, my Lord," said Earl Belfont, laughing, "we shall see when you come among us. I suppose you will soon leave town,—I am on the wing for Brighton, though I detest the place, but it is pretty full, and therefore one may find amusement of some sort or other, for a week or two." Lord Somerset coolly wished him a pleasant ride, and left him with a sentiment of contempt for such fashionable principles, as do not allow a man to decide and judge in some measure for himself.

On his return to Portland Place he found Lady Somerset and Hermine much disconcerted, and expressing their mutual regrets for the absence of the Douglas family. A journey so sudden and unexpected they could not account for in any other

way, than supposing it had taken place in consequence of indisposition either of Douglas or Fidelia. They had no doubt but that Lewis had accompanied the family, and equally regretted the circumstance, though from feelings very different. Lady Somerset entertained much esteem for his character, and gratitude for his attentions to her beloved niece, and an earnest desire to introduce him to her son as a respectable young man, whose natural talents and excellent heart deserved to be placed in a line superior to his humble birth; and made her feel disappointment that he should have left England previous to their arrival, when they were daily expected. But if Lady Somerset had her regrets, how much more poignant were those endured by her beautiful niece. To be sure she allowed Lewis to have only a *small share* in them, she would no doubt have felt pleasure to have seen him with all his improvements, such as her aunt had described him to be;—but it was
friendship—

friendship—it was the dear Fidelia, *alone*, that caused her to shed tears, and swelled her bosom with sorrow and vexation; certainly it could proceed only from the disappointment to friendship. Fidelia, indeed, might find consolation in the society of a father, and with such a worthy companion as Lewis. Well, and why should not she seek to derive equal benefit from the no less parental regards of her aunt, and the affectionate attentions of Lord Somerset? It would be ungrateful to such kind friends to indulge fruitless regrets.—No, she hoped Fidelia would recover health, and Lewis enjoy pleasure by this journey, and she would not selfishly repine at her own loss, since those she loved and esteemed, were likely to be well and happy.

A deep sigh to *gratitude* was just blown off, when she was requested to join Lady Somerset in her dressing room, to be introduced to two ladies of her acquaintance.

Hermine instantly obeyed,—and was presented to Lady Meynel, and Miss Snarler—the former, an amiable married lady, about five-and-thirty; the other, an old unmarried Miss of three-and-fifty, an aunt to her Ladyship, and a woman of very large fortune. There was also, as their attendant, Sir Godfrey Kennedy.

Lady Meynel had been married early in life to a gay, dissipated young man, whose fortune being appropriated to usurers, and the money lending tribe, long before the death of his father, though chiefly after he became of age, when he came to take possession of his title and estate, he found but little to support the first, and the latter so encumbered with annuities, reversionary engagements, bonds, &c. that it became an indispensable business to look out for a wife whose fortune should redeem his estates, and enable him to support his title and consequence. He neither stipulated
for

for birth or beauty, money was the sole object of his desires; and when, through the management of a convenient friend, he was introduced to Mr. Snarler, and saw his daughter, though a little surprised at her form and elegant manners, he was so absorbed in enumerating the thousands she was said to be heiress to, that he had not time or inclination to investigate the personal charms of his intended bride.

Mr. Snarler's father had been a corn-factor, and in that business had acquired a very large fortune, little short of a hundred thousand pounds. Twenty thousand he bequeathed to his daughter Susanna, the residue solely to his son Richard. This son immediately embarked great part of his property in a banking-house, and rapidly increased in riches. His sister also was directed in ways and means to improve her fortune; and at the period when Eliza Snarler became the wife of Lord Meynel,

her father gave seventy thousand pounds down, with an assurance of five thousand more on the birth of every child she might have, and a good round sum besides at his death.

Miss Snarler also laid out three thousand pounds in jewels for her Lady niece.— Having more than doubled the sum left by her father, strange to tell, she remained unmarried, a circumstance that by no means contributed to her good humour, candour, or patience, neither of which had she ever possessed any tolerable share of; consequently at this period she was satirical, envious of youth and beauty, a detractor of merit, and a promulgator of scandalous tales against young people of either sex.

After the death of her brother, she was invited by Lord Meynel to reside in his family, impelled to this apparent civility by

a double motive.—He was conscious that he behaved very unworthily to his wife, that she was a woman of merit, who deserved better treatment, that she was thought beautiful by most people, and might be an object of libertine pursuits. Now, though Lord Meynel did not care sixpence for his wife, and had very little tenderness in his composition, he had an abundance of pride; and having, as he thought, condescended to lift the descendant of a trader into the noble family of the Meynel's, he totally forgot that it was her fortune which supported the dignity of his house—and feeling that he had degraded himself by the alliance, he was doubly anxious to preserve his name from any further contamination.

He knew the disposition of Miss Snarler—the only person she had a shadow of regard for, was her niece; but she was an invidious observer even of her conduct, and so prone

to think ill of every one else, so watchful and jealous of every attention paid to the charms of others, from the long neglect she had herself endured, that he could depend on her vigilance to preserve his honour; and superadded to that important consideration, was another of little less magnitude, he could watch over Miss Snarler's fortune, and by having her under his roof, effectually guard against the approach of needy, mercenary adventurers. Miss Snarler, not penetrating into causes, was contented to enjoy the effects; her pride and self-consequence was flattered by her residence with Lord and Lady Meynel—their reflected dignity exalted her as a near relative; and her natural importance being highly increased, the irritability of her disposition had fresh fuel to exercise its malignity on others.

Lady Meynel, whose sweetness of temper, and uncomplaining patience, endeared her

her to all who had the pleasure of her acquaintance, having been accustomed to respect her aunt, who had the care of her from an infant, very readily joined in her Lord's invitation; and making candid allowance for the fretfulness of age, disappointed hopes, and the consequence single ladies are apt to assume, from an idea that the world treats them with less respect than they deserve, bore all the defects in her temper with perfect good humour, and made her her constant companion.

Sir Godfrey Kennedy, distantly related to Lord Meynel, was one of those old boys (if the term may be allowed) who have been great rakes in their youth, and in a life of frivolity, waste their health, their reputation, and fortune, without growing wiser by experience, or obliterating the follies of youth by a more dignified conduct in their old age. Sir Godfrey was still a beau, still an attendant on youth and beauty—

beauty—and still retained all his frivolous habits of hyperbolical compliments, all his attempts at tender glances, and eternal boasts of favours from the fair. He was a great admirer of Lady Meynel; and she indulged all his follies and caprices, his vanity and self-importance, merely to divert herself, as she might be amused by the tricks of a monkey.

Such were the trio to whom Hermine was introduced by her aunt. The little English she had gleaned from Fidelia, had been something improved by her aunt and Lord Somerset, who delighted to be considered as her tutor; but she was too diffident to venture an address in that language, and therefore apologized for returning their compliments in French.—Both Lady Meynel and Sir Godfrey spake the language very well; but it had not been a part of Miss Snarler's education—to read the bible, spell in the primer, and
work

work on a sampler, were all *her* good parents thought necessary for a young girl to learn, —“ and she was very sure the young people so properly taught, made better wives, mothers, and mistresses, than those of the present day, whose follies, and fashions, made them unfit for any thing but to waste time and money.”

Whilst Lady Meynel and her old beau paid the most lively attention to the beautiful foreigner, Miss Snarler viewed her with scowling envy, and a rancorous heart. “ She hated foreigners, she despised vain handsome girls, Misses were her aversion ; ” —nor could the title of Lady, by which Lady Somerset introduced Hermine, reconcile her to her *youth and beauty*—those were faults she could never forgive.

When Hermine was informed that Miss Snarler was unacquainted with any language but her own, natural politeness induced

duced her to conquer the reluctance she felt to expose her little proficiency in the English tongue, and to address that lady with a diffidence and sweetness of manner, that would have disarmed the severest critic of his malice, and rendered her faulty accent enchanting from such a beautiful mouth. But the charm that would have "soothed a savage beast, or softened rocks," lost all its power on the more flinty bosom of Miss Snarler, who was envy personified. A haughty toss of her head, an ungracious bend of her body, were the only returns she made to the considerate attention of the young stranger.—But her eyes run her over with a malignancy so visible, that Hermine shrunk confused from the scrutiny, whilst Lady Meynel, extremely hurt, redoubled her polite regards.

Sir Godfrey, still an enthusiastic admirer of beauty, loaded her with the most extravagant compliments, and protested, that
since

since he had last viewed the Hampton-Court beauties, he had never beheld such exquisite perfection. "Really, Sir Godfrey," cried Miss Snarler, "such gross flattery is highly disgusting, and miserably proves your want of taste." "My dear aunt," interrupted Lady Meynel, "pray indulge Sir Godfrey, he delights in saying handsome things; and were he to pass over such a fair opportunity as this to shew his gallantry, his judgment would be called in question I am very sure.—But not to oppress Lady Hermine, we will change the subject."

"By all means," said Miss Snarler;—"and, apropos, Lady Somerset, have you heard of my Lord E's. pretty romantic flights?"—"I know very little of my Lord E." replied her Ladyship. "Indeed!—why you are related, are you not?"—"Yes, but that does not entitle me to scrutinize his conduct; but I have in general

neral heard him very well spoken of.”—
“O, no one questions his being well-looking, sensible, and accomplished; but like his brother rakes, he must attach himself to a *foreign beauty*, who has jilted him, and, as a gentleman would say, played the devil with his fortune and character.”

“Fye, fye, my dear aunt,” cried Lady Meynel, laughing, “how can you utter such a naughty word, and after the male creatures too?” “Why, because another word equally strong did not occur to me, — but, however, the story goes thus, — you may recollect, — O, but no, you were not come to England, therefore I must tell you an Austrian Count was here, a very few months since, with a beautiful woman who passed for his wife some time, but turned out to be an Italian courtesan; for, after a few weeks the Count took the famous Madame R—, from the opera, and they left England together.”

“How

“How does this concern Lord E.?” asked Lady Somerset, rather impatiently. “O, you shall hear in a moment:—This quondam Countess being deserted, in the fashionable language of the day, accepted the protection of Lord E. who took an elegant house, and made a handsome establishment for her, and they blazed in great style all about town. My Lord, it seems, went, a short time back, to Newmarket, where he was finely taken in, and lost many thousands; — meanwhile, his beautiful Italian formed a connexion with a young Frenchman who came to England with a son of the late Mrs. Douglas—.” Hermine started,—Lady Somerset, who had appeared to listen, but was really inattentive, just caught the last sentence, “I beg your pardon, Miss Snarler, I did not correctly hear your last words.” The lady repeated them, and without observing the emotions her tale produced, volubly proceeded,—
“With this young foreigner the lady lived

a short distance in the country, my Lord came home unexpectedly, discovered their retreat, — fought with and dangerously wounded the young Frenchman.” — “Wounded him!” exclaimed Hermine, in a tremor too visible not to excite the attention and remarks of the relator. — “Yes, *wounded* him, Miss, — but pray is he a relation of your’s, that you appear to be in such a terrible fright?” “No, Madam,” returned Lady Somerset, “but my niece had a friend abroad who recommended a French gentleman as a companion to young Mr. Douglas, and she feels rather interested, lest it should be him: — But you may be assured, my dear,” added she, turning to Hermine, “that Mr. Berthier has certainly accompanied his young friend and the family abroad. — It cannot be, I think it cannot be the same person.”

“His young friend,” rejoined Miss Snarler, “you do not mean the late son of
Mr.

Mr. Douglas?" "Late son!" cried Hermine, "why, Madam, is young Frederic Douglas dead?" "Yes, Miss,—and Mr. Douglas and his late acknowledged daughter, (there's another fine mysterious affair come to light,—what a world this is!) but as I was saying, Mr. Douglas and this new found daughter are gone with Lord Douglas to the south of France." "And Lewis not with them?" exclaimed Hermine, whose concern for young Frederic was all swallowed up in her anxiety for Lewis. "I really know not what attendants they have with them," answered Miss Snarler, scrutinizing the varying complexion of poor Hermine, "but the Frenchman I am speaking of, the gallant of the Italian lady and the object of Lord E's resentment, did come to England with young Douglas;—it may be," added she, with a malicious smile, "that he preferred the service of the ladies.—Well, but I have not told half my story yet." "Pray then, Madam, proceed," said

said Lady Somerset, now feeling some interest in the conclusion.

Miss Snarler obeyed,—“The Frenchman was dangerously wounded,—the lady fell into fits,—my Lord went home in a passion, and sent her a dismissal,—but she has plundered him finely of bonds and annuities, run him in debt with his tradespeople,—and in short, between the races and his lady, he is quite done up,—a lost man, and fled into the country. She is in town, but whether the wounded French fellow is with her, or at her house in the country, I can’t learn, nor is it worth knowing,—’tis sufficient that she has ruined his Lordship;—and for my part, I wish all young men of fashion, who pick up these foreign creatures, and suffer such wretches to assume the dress and consequence of persons of rank, were every one of them to suffer the ill effects of their folly, like Lord E.”

“Upon

“Upon honour, Madam,” said Sir Godfrey, “you have told a most dolorous story, and conclude rather a little too severely,—for there really is a fascination in most foreign ladies, that few gentlemen of any discrimination can possibly resist; and without any disparagement to the charms of my fair countrywomen, I must be allowed to observe that they do not sacrifice to the graces, like the French and Italian ladies.”

“I am quite shocked to hear you,” cried Miss Snarler, “at *your age*, now got to your *sober senses*, can you, Sir Godfrey, prefer the licentious foreigners to the English ladies?” “Madam,” returned he, drawing up with a stately air, “at every age a man preserves his respect and admiration for the ladies; and when I do justice to the captivating powers of the French and Italians, I beg to be understood, that I make no invidious comparisons.—No man more *warmly* admires the beauty and modesty of our charming countrywomen, than

I do." "Modesty!" exclaimed Miss Snarler, "perhaps *there might be a semblance* of it in the age *you lived in*; but I protest the effrontery and indelicacy of the present race of females is truly shocking. —I do not wonder men are afraid to marry, for the licentious manners of the women are repulsive and disgusting."

"My dear aunt," cried Lady Meynel, laughing, "your warmth has misled you. —I thought you were standing forth a champion for the English ladies." "Not I, indeed:—I heartily despise two thirds of them, but I absolutely *hate* the foreigners." "But dear Miss Snarler," said Lady Somerset, smiling, "is not *that* carrying prejudice too far? Are there not amiable persons in all countries? The qualities of the mind, any more than the beauty of the person, is surely not confined to any particular nation."

"I

“ I beg your pardon, my Lady, I had forgot you were a foreigner; were all ladies *imported here*, possessed of *your virtues*, I should soon grow in charity with them.— But in truth your Ladyship has so few *compeers*, that I may well be excused for forgetting the exception to an almost general opinion in our sex, I believe.” “ I cannot be gratified by a compliment so unmerited,” returned Lady Somerset, “ and you will pardon me if I take the liberty to observe that illiberal prejudices, and unqualified censure on any particular nation, solely because they are foreigners, is so unlike the generous candour of the English, that I trust such narrow ideas are confined to a very small circle;—and that those who disseminate such opinions, and sport their wit at the expence of their good-nature, feel very little gratification, and *much less* approbation from generous and liberal minds.”

“ Your

“Your Ladyship is warm,” said Miss Snarler, “I protest I had not the smallest intention to offend, much less to include *you* in the observations I made.” “*Your warmth, Madam,*” rejoined her Ladyship, “might *possibly* carry you beyond your intention; and I assure you that I should have passed it over with the utmost indifference, but this young lady is a stranger to the English character. She understands the language sufficiently to be sensible of the unpolite and illiberal sentiments she has witnessed;—and were she to suppose that *you had many compeers*, what an unfavourable opinion must she form of the candour and generosity of a nation she has been taught to revere.”

“Well, my Lady, well, I stand corrected, I beg your and the Lady’s pardon;—if she deserves, I am sure she will meet with the respect her rank may entitle her to from the English, who are all but too fond

fond of——, but I have done; let every one take the consequence of their own folly,—Lord E. smarts pretty well for his. As to the woman and her gallant, they'll cut a great dash abroad, with their English guineas, I suppose."

"A truce with this subject, my dearest aunt," said Lady Meynel, who had evidently been much hurt. "I hope Lady Somerset will allow me to cultivate an acquaintance with the amiable Lady Hermine, and that when I have an opportunity of paying my respects to her again, we shall find some more agreeable topics for our conversation."

Lady Somerset and her niece made very suitable returns to this compliment, when Sir Godfrey with a profound bow, said, "I shall carry with me a deep impression of this young lady's charms, and have only to request that when on her entrée into public, she obtains universal admiration, she will have the

goodness to remember that I had the honour to be her *first captive*." A smile and a graceful bow from Hermine was the only return she made to this polite beau of the old school, whilst Miss Snarler, with a disdainful toss of her head, muttered, " Formal, vain creature!" and attempted in her turn to say something polite, but the cold, dignified air of Hermine awed her into silence; and from Lady Somerset she met a most repulsive bend of the neck, that made her flounce out of the room, scarcely able to repress her passion, that was nearly on the point of out-stepping the bounds of prudence and good manners,

CHAP.

CH A P. XXVII.



WHEN Lady Somerset and Hermine were left to a *tet   a tet  *, each waited a moment in expectation of the other's speaking; —Hermine was visibly confused and uneasy. “What a narrow-minded, illiberal woman is that Miss Snarler,” observed Lady Somerset, “never was a name more appropriate to disposition than that of her's. Only her connexion with Lady Meynel, who is really amiable, can make her be tolerated by any family.”

“ She appears to be a very unpleasant woman,” said Hermine, “ and totally unacquainted with good breeding, or she would have had some consideration for the company.” “ The invidious story she gave us, though I doubt not by her very greatly exaggerated, has given me some concern,” said her Ladyship, “ I feel anxious to have it investigated. Lord E. is in many respects an amiable character, I have heard some of his friends lament his passion for horse-racing; but a young man, not thirty, is carried away by the stream of fashion, and acquires habits more from example and carelessness at first, than from a propensity of his own, till at length those habits get rooted, because he has too much indolence to struggle against the tide of dissipation, or to resist the persuasions of his companions.”

“ Indeed,” returned Hermine, with some hesitation, “ the account she gave of the
Italian

Italian Lady and her French gallant, appears very strange. I think—I hope—it cannot be Lewis Berthier who comes under that character.—Poor Frederic Douglas!” added she, tears bursting from her eyes, “though I knew little of him, yet when I consider his youth, his lively spirits, and the natural expectations of his family, I cannot but lament his premature death, and feel for the sorrow that must overwhelm his relations. And could Lewis leave them in such melancholy circumstances? Impossible! and if they did not wish to retain him, what must we think of his conduct? Ah, poor Agnes! can it be possible that your duteous, grateful son, can be already corrupted by the world!”

A fresh gush of tears stopped her from proceeding. Lady Somerset looked surprised;—“This dear girl,” thought she, “has too much sensibility;—a sense of kindness and gratitude to poor Agnes and

her son, softens her heart, and will be injurious to her peace if she indulges it." After a moment's pause she said, "Compose yourself, my love, we naturally regret if persons whom we have always been accustomed to esteem and love, should fall into error, and prove unworthy of our regard and affection;—but I will hope much better from young Berthier. If he has deceived us, I shall never trust my judgment again, for there was an open manliness in his manner, and an ingenuous mind so depicted in his countenance, that should it be proved in him a false letter of recommendation, I must for ever give up my skill in physiognomy."

"Ah, Madam!" returned Hermine, "poor Douglas was not a proper companion for a youth so unacquainted with men and manners.—Possibly, though I hope not, yet it is not improbable, that Lewis may have been corrupted by example,

ample, and plunged rapidly into error, without friendship and advice to rescue him from the danger."

"We will preserve our charity in spite of Miss Snarler," returned Lady Somerset, "and hope still that the young man will appear to deserve our countenance. I shall request Lord Somerset to investigate the whole of the business thoroughly." With this promise Hermine appeared to be consoled and satisfied, and rallying her spirits, spake very highly of Lady Meynel, and seemed to be amused by the character of Sir Godfrey.

"He is a beau of the last age," said Lady Somerset, "and his profound respect and admiration which he carries sometimes to excess towards all handsome women, makes him the jest of the young folks of the present day, who have fallen into the contrary extreme.

You must not be surprised, though you may feel your delicacy wounded, if you are treated with a careless freedom—an unhandsome *stare*, and hear the opinions of those who view you loudly expressed without regard to decorum or female modesty,—when you shall make your appearance in public.”

“ Oh, Madam!” cried Hermine, “ if such are the manners of the present day, they are a satire upon good sense, as well as good breeding. I shall have very little inclination to make a public appearance; but how comes it that my cousin, Lord Somerset, is so unlike the portrait you have drawn? He is polite and amiable, and his agrémens appear unstudied, and the result of feeling.”

Lady Somerset, delighted by those encomiums bestowed on her son, thought this a favourable moment to give some few hints

hints, of the wish nearest to her heart.—

“ I am happy, my dear, that he is so fortunate as to merit your good opinion.—

You will forgive the vanity of a fond mother, when I assure you that my son has not many equals either in his heart, understanding, or person. He is not a unique, that's certain, but in the words of Miss Snarler, he has not *many compeers*. I am proud, I confess, of his virtues, he has been from his juvenile days the most affectionate of sons, and the kindest of brothers; he is the most considerate of masters—and a man who performs all the relative duties, gives almost a moral assurance of his being a good man. Perfection is not to be met with, or expected, he has no doubt his foibles; he may sometimes fall into error, but a good heart can neither intentionally do wrong, nor persist in error, should he unadvisedly be drawn into it.

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“ The

“ The gentleman who accompanied him in his travels, speaks of his conduct and character in the most flattering terms; and the happiness of this deserving son engages all my thoughts and most anxious wishes. Much of the complexion of his future life must depend on his choice of a wife; much have I dreaded the fascination of beauty, and the artful blandishments of some avaricious, interested female—happily he has escaped from many snares spread for him abroad, and has not permitted fancy to supersede judgment. He returned to me *heart-whole*, perfectly disengaged in his affections.—*He is no longer so,*” added she, smiling; “ it was his fate to be captivated by a superior blaze of beauty, of which he had no idea, nor till he *saw me*, could pourtray to his mind’s eye, though he had often drawn a fancied portrait of perfection. Complexion and features he had seen with admiration, in many countries, without being enslaved; but

but it was the *mind* that illumined the countenance, and gave it a radiance he had never till then beheld, and was not prepared to resist, which in a few hours obtained an entire controul over his heart, and most probably determined *his fate*, and confirms or destroys all my hope of happiness."

Here she paused—maternal feelings visibly agitated her; for as she had proceeded, she had keenly watched the effect of her speech upon the features of Hermine. . . When she came to his return, "perfectly disengaged in his affections," with the following words, "he is no longer so," she was equally surprised and hurt to observe the ingenuous countenance of Hermine instantly overspread with blushes, and an air of sadness pervade her whole face, totally unlike the blush of delicacy, or conscious pleasure. The words and appropriate look were too pointed to pass unobserved; and novice as Hermine was
in

in such scenes, the looks of Lord Somerset, now explained by this hint of his mother's, almost instantly struck her with a conviction, that she was the object so highly complimented with making an impression on the disengaged heart of her cousin—the knowledge afforded her no pleasure, and her looks were the transcript of her mind.

Lady Somerset was too well acquainted with human nature, and the recesses of a female heart, to mistake the nature of those blushes, and the down cast eye of Hermine—there was no latent exultation, no secret conscious delight to animate the features through the glow of modesty.—She saw, and was shocked by the different expression that conveyed no favourable reception of her wishes; and the conclusion of her address was in a tone of dejection that pained Hermine to the heart. She started from her seat, — “My dearest aunt,”

aunt," said she, clasping one of her hands between both of her's, "my cousin is the most amiable man I have ever yet seen; whoever he honours with his regards cannot be insensible to his merit—may every event requisite to ensure your happiness, and his, be fulfilled to the utmost extent of your wishes.—I must ever be deeply interested in both, for you are the only persons dear to my heart, equally by duty and inclination." "I thank you, my dear *niece*," returned her Ladyship, laying an emphasis on the word *niece*, and sorry to hear her so composedly eloquent, "I thank you for your obliging wishes; but our best hopes often prove fruitless, our projected plans for happiness fail of success, and all, like an airy vision, fade into nothing."

Before Hermine could recover from her confusion and visible concern, Lord Somerset entered the room. He had scarcely made his bow, and began to advance, before

fore he stopped short,—“Am I an intruder?” asked he, “there is an air of serious business in your faces, ladies, which possibly I have interrupted.” “No,” answered Lady Somerset, “it is more possible that a third person is an agreeable relief.”—Then, without giving time for any further remarks, she strove to recover her composure; and proceeded to tell him of the visitors who had so recently taken leave.

“Oh!” cried he, laughing, “I no longer feel surprise at the unusual gloom I saw on your countenance. That envious, malignant old—damsel I will call her, to soften the asperity of old, that Miss Snarler I well remember, though I have not seen her for near three years—she was always my aversion. I called her the scandalous chronicle, and envy personified; for, upon my honour, I never heard her speak well of any person, male or female; and her delight was to poison the innocent mirth
of

of a party by an invidious tale of scandal; or an unfortunate event in which some person in company, or their relatives, were implicated." "You have exactly delineated the character of the lady, indeed," said Lady Somerset, "for we have just had cases in point;—but I wish for *your* assistance to develop the truth of her information in the tales related to us, because both my niece and myself feel ourselves greatly interested, as they concern her friend Berthier, and your relation Lord E." She then repeated the story told by Miss Snarler. "I have a double motive to animate my zeal in your service, ladies,—to oblige my mother and my charming cousin, also to detect the malice of this "Lady Blue-mantle," who is a pest to society."

At that moment Lady Somerset was informed a tradesman was in waiting by her desire; and as she was not of that order of beings who take consequence to themselves
by

by exacting homage, trying the patience, or inconsiderately robbing an industrious person of his time, which often happens to be a serious evil, she instantly left the room. Lord Somerset viewed the blushing face and downcast eye of Hermine with silent surprise;—the flatterer hope in that moment communicated transport to his heart.—He had never before beheld her so agitated, and in the transient delirium of passion he caught her hand, and tenderly pressing it, forgot all his intended precautions, for with a fervor he could not repress or disguise, in a few incoherent words, he discovered the secret of his soul; and whilst he laid his whole heart and most ardent wishes open to her view, he passionately besought her favour, and assured her the future happiness of his life was entirely in her power, and dependant on the gift of her hand.

The

The feelings of Hermine were undescribable—she shrank from the offer of love, whilst she truly esteemed the lover. Language and sentiments so new to her overpowered her with confusion, but it was more of pain than of pleasure that it conveyed to her heart; yet so little was she prepared to hear, or to answer a declaration of love, that she was entirely at a loss for words, nor could she give utterance to a single sentence. Lord Somerset was too delicate to oppress her further at that moment.—“Propitious be your silence, my dear Hermine,” said he, kissing her hand. “Forgive the impetuosity of passion, and be assured that my respect is equal to my love.—Think favourably of both, I conjure you; let me carry with me the transporting hope that my beloved mother and her son, will owe the happiness of their future days to your generous condescension and favour.” Then, again bowing on her hand, he considerably left the room, whilst
Hermine,

Hermine, still unable to utter a syllable, only bowed to his last speech, unconscious that by her silent bow she had strengthened hope, and given a tacit approbation to his claims for her favour.

She remained fixed in her chair, overcome by emotions to which she was a stranger, and so little acquainted with the feelings of her heart, that she seemed involved in a labyrinth of thought, without the power to develope them, or any clue to lead her into the knowledge of her own sentiments. That she warmly esteemed Lord Somerset was most certain—that she dearly loved and venerated her aunt was also unquestionable; and that in any shape to be instrumental towards their felicity, seemed to be the first wish of her heart.—But to marry Lord Somerset!—She trembled at the idea—it was a subject wholly new to her, she could not reconcile herself to think of it.

Whilst

Whilst she was thus hurried and perplexed, Lady Somerset hastily entered the room, and clasping her arms round her, cried out in a voice of transport,—“ Have I been rightly informed, do I indeed embrace my future daughter, in the person of my beloved niece?—Oh, my dear Hermine! in that sweet hope I have not a wish ungratified.” What could the poor irresolute Hermine answer to this?—She was overcome—this transport, and this kindness penetrated to her heart.—She returned her aunt’s caresses, and dropping her head upon her bosom, replied softly,—“ My dear aunt, make me every thing you wish, my happiness can never be separated from your’s.”

The human mind is naturally prone to believe what it wishes, if there is a shadow of hope on which it can rest.—Lady Somerset saw nothing in this reply but a timid and delicate confirmation of her son’s report,

report, which had been so unexpected, that her joy was proportionate to the pain she had so recently felt from doubt and apprehension. She said a thousand tender things to her amiable niece, congratulated herself and her son on the prospect of a union so ardently desired, and blessed Heaven for its goodness in thus restoring to her the daughter she had been deprived of, so deservedly beloved and so bitterly regretted.—“And, oh, my beloved Hermine,” she continued, “how will the gentle spirit of your sainted mother rejoice in the happiness of her child, the sole object of her cares, and committed by her dying breath to the protection of her only sister!”

Hermine, almost drowned in tears by this tender effusion, started at the name of her mother; it instantly recurred to her that she had possibly the will of a father to consult, in the packet committed to her care.

care. She was struck by the sudden recollection, that she might already have trespassed on the duty she owed to his sacred requests, by quitting a retired life before she attained the age of one-and-twenty. Too ingenuous to disguise her feelings, her exclamations on the conviction of her mind that she had done wrong, surprised and alarmed Lady Somerset;—and when Hermine explained the nature of her terror—her dread of having incurred the sin of disobedience, her Ladyship found it very difficult to compose her spirits, or restore her to peace with herself.

Lady Somerset deduced her consolations from the improbability that her father should ever intend to keep her a recluse from society, could he have foreseen the short period of his life at the time he proposed her residence in the convent till she was one-and-twenty. That he had hoped and intended to reside in the Abbey of St. Hubert

bert was certain, and to have her near him was a very natural desire;—his motives for preferring this solitary forest, they were unacquainted with,—“and, indeed,” added Lady Somerset, “it has more than once occurred to me, a doubt, whether now, situated as you are, you ought not to open that packet. Your destiny is in some measure decided on by our happy meeting;—the will of your grand-father confided you to our care, if unhappily you were deprived of a mother, and were unmarried; it was his desire that you should be educated in a convent, and in that particular your father complied with the tenor of the will.

“At one-and-twenty you were by my dear father’s will your own mistress, and as there is every reason to believe that all your property in France, was dissipated, and your late father could not know of the wise precaution that secured to you fifteen thousand pounds in the English funds, now by
accumulation

accumulation I should suppose above one third more,—it seems to me most natural to conclude, there was a period when he intended to resign you to the care of your dear mother's relatives;—why he chose to delay it, may possibly be accounted for in his papers."

"I am not casuist enough to determine on points of conscience, from my own judgment," returned Hermine, "or to decide positively how far present circumstances may justify me in the non-observance of commands I have ever deemed sacred. I remember once whilst we were in that ruinous castle, he said, "Oh, that I may live to place my much wronged Hermine in the protection of——." He stopped there as if by a sudden recollection, then added, "Perhaps I may recover from this fatigue,—I may yet enjoy the company of my child some time longer.—Oh, that we could but reach the convent!

save

save us Heaven from perishing here, so near to the haven of my wishes, yet so far from the chance of human aid!"

"I offered to explore the forest,—to seek the convent, but the danger terrified him. "We will wait one day longer whilst we have any nourishment left, I may be better to-morrow;—if not, alas, my child, what will become of you?" This was spoken the evening preceding the day that Providence directed Lewis Berthier to our aid, after a most tempestuous night, when we dreaded every instant to be buried in the ruins of the castle. Little alteration had taken place in my dear father's appearance. I saw he was not better, though I did not believe him worse;—far, very far was I then from expecting the sudden change.—The rain and wind had penetrated through, and shook the covering of the chapel, he complained of cold—I went into the thick wood in search of some fuel,
and

and Heaven was pleased to guide the eyes of Lewis, and bring him to us. Alas, I believe the sudden transport overpowered the weak frame of my father, and occasioned his almost immediate dissolution!"

Hermine could not pronounce the last words without tears, which Lady Somerset sought to dry up by her affectionate caresses. "Let us not cloud this day, which I consider as a happy one, with unavailing sorrow;—look forward, my beloved girl, to days and years of happiness. The mother and the son will find their felicity in promoting that of *your's*, to the last hour of their existence." Hermine kissed the hand of her aunt, but the action was accompanied by a deep and involuntary sigh, placed by her Ladyship to a very different cause from the real one. She concluded it arose from Hermine's doubt about the will of her father, and therefore hastened to assure her she would consult her worthy chaplain on the subject, and by his advice be deter-

mined whether the important packet should be opened now, or referred until the time mentioned by her father. With this design her niece gladly acquiesced, and after a few more kind congratulations, thanks, and caresses, from her affectionate aunt, Hermine withdrew to her own apartment; there to reflect, that in the words of Lady Somerset, " Her destiny seemed to be decided, and that without one word from her mouth, consent to her cousin's addresses had been taken by implication, and she was considered by both as the future wife of Lord Somerset." What had she to oppose against this conclusion? Nothing, if the will of her father had not predetermined for her;—and whilst a half smothered wish rose in her bosom that it might be so, she shuddered to think what line of duty might be imposed upon her, and at the same time accused herself of ingratitude to her aunt and cousin, for feeling the smallest reluctance to comply with their desires. In this
restless,

restless, self-reproving state, we must for the present leave Hermine, and look back on Lewis, who, with Lord E. had by easy journies, arrived in a much improved state of health, at Elworth-Hall, for the first time his Lordship had visited this, his paternal estate, since the death of his father. A courier had preceded them, and given timely notice to prepare every thing desirable for their accommodation ; and as it had been a favourite seat of the late Lord's, it had been kept in such excellent repair, that a seven years' neglect had not made much depredation on either the buildings or furniture.

CHAP. XXVIII.

FOR the first week after the arrival of Lord E. at Elworth-Hall, the novelty of the scenes, the beautiful face of the country, and their daily rides round the boundaries of the estate, sufficiently diverted his Lordship and his guest in the hours they passed together; but neither of them were free from inquietude when night and solitude gave them both up to reflection.

Lewis

Lewis recovering from a debility of body, regained also the energy of his mind;—and the sense of his situation, wholly dependent on the bounty of a nobleman, almost a stranger to him, was painful in the extreme. If the generous condescension of Lord E. overlooked the immense distance birth and fortune had placed between them; yet he was conscious that he had no claims to justify him in receiving such favours, much less to indulge himself in luxury and idleness, so incompatible with his humble state, and future views. He blamed himself for not speaking openly to his Lordship, and explaining to him what those views were; but the truth was, that he could not say exactly what line of life would suit him.

The good Father Francis had rather consulted the warmth of *his wishes* to serve Lewis, than the strength of his pupil's abilities.—

lities.—His proficiency in the German and Italian languages, was not, he thought, sufficient to authorize him in offering his services on that score. He was well convinced, from his observations on men and manners in Florence, in their journey to England, and from what little knowledge he had gleaned of both, since his arrival in London, that all he knew was superficial, and by no means entitled him to hope for a situation such as his good old friend had intended him to figure in. “What then,” cried Lewis, “is to become of me? I feel that I cannot submit to live thus idly on bounty, and the generous kindness to which I have no claims;—it was not my intention so to live with my much lamented friend, Douglas, and shall I be the wretched drone to draw my existence from dependence, when I have youth and health to labour?—O, no,—I must, I will leave Lord E.” This determination brought on a train of other ideas that pressed severely on

on his heart, and he passed a sleepless night in building castles, and revolving a number of projects for his future pursuits, without being able to fix on one that offered any prospect of success.

The mind of Lord E. was not much more at ease than that of our hero.—When first he had attached himself to Eleanora, he admired her beauty, and his vanity was gratified in being her avowed protector;—love had but a slight colouring in the passion he professed for her,—but it was the fate of that woman to fascinate and enslave her victims imperceptible to themselves.—She was another Circe, no one could see her with indifference, except such a cold and tasteless being as she pronounced Lewis to be.—No one once entangled in her snares could preserve his senses from being enchanted by her exquisitely captivating powers.

Lord E. was not sensible of the dominion she had acquired over his heart, till convinced of her infidelity and baseness.—Pride, resentment, and, he believed, contempt and detestation enabled him to triumph over love, and break from her chains. When she told him he had never been the object of her regards, a proud sense of his own attractions, and what he had done for her, caused him to resent her selfish baseness, and spurn at her ingratitude and abandoned principles. The imposition she had practised on his feelings with a view to get Lewis to her house, increased his resentment, and abhorrence of her duplicity.—In that moment, to fly from such a base woman was the impulse of his passion, and the quietude of the country the most desirable, as well as the most prudent choice he could make.

A few days was given to novelty and plans of improvement,—two very valuable estates

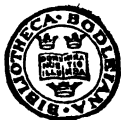
estates had been sold to discharge his gaming engagements, and other improvident expences in the course of three years continual round of dissipation.—Elworth-Hall was now the only unincumbered patrimony his follies had left him, this could not be alienated, and he resolved to cultivate the grounds and improve the old mansion-house. The conversation of Lewis, the genuine sentiments of an unsophisticated heart was new, and for a short time uncommonly pleasant,—but novelty wore off, those sentiments grew trite, too moral and fatiguing to his spirits;—he found ennui growing fast upon him,—he felt a vacuum that only could be filled up by the gay and riotous companions he had been accustomed to.

The beautiful face, the elegant form of Eleanora perpetually haunted his imagination,—her vices ceased to create horror, her errors were the constitutional faults of

her country and education; and her predilection for Lewis had commenced before she knew England or his Lordship.—Possibly his desertion of her in going to Newmarket had wounded equally her pride and her love; and, as an Italian, she sought revenge for those apparent slights. And then, were domestics to be credited?—would not those mercenary wretches say and do any thing to slander the reputation of their employers, if either interest or resentment impelled them to calumny?—In short, whatever were her vices, his heart acknowledged her power,—his senses were enslaved by her beauty;—and now, that passion wore off, she did not appear half so culpable. If there was much to blame, there was also much to admire; in *her company* the hours had danced away with joy and rapture,—now they were tedious and wearisome, nothing to engage his heart, nor any thing to charm his senses. He found the country detestable, and solitude, with
one

one grave companion only, totally insupportable.

Then curiosity came in for its share—what was become of her?—how did she take their absence?—had she found a new protector?—That idea was intolerable, he could not bear it.—He must either return to London, or send some confidential agent to glean intelligence of all those circumstances that were still interesting to his peace. Such was the nature of the reflections that pressed on the mind of Lord E. and before eight days after this journey, so fraught with peace and happiness in the imagination of both, were terminated, both gave evident marks of restlessness, of constrained manners, and enforced cheerfulness; and partook, without enjoying, all those rural delights, which they saw charmed the surrounding neighbourhood, but which administered no pleasure to minds diseased.



Lewis

Lewis very quickly discovered that Lord E. grew tired of the country; and remarked how frequently he talked of Eleonora, seeming rather to palliate her vices, than to detest her crimes—oftener to dwell on her beauty and excessive loveliness of person with rapture, than to regard it as a gilded covering to a corrupt heart.—And he thought too, there *were times* when his Lordship looked *coldly on him*. “ ’Tis time for me to go,” exclaimed he, one morning, when he was seated in a small arbor erected in a thick shrubbery, “ tho’ where to go I know not; without friends, fortune, or connexions, in a strange country, little acquainted with the language, where can I seek an asylum?—What pretensions can *I* carry to expect that any family will receive me into their house as a tutor to youth, when I have neither accomplishments or knowledge that can entitle me to ask for a situation of so much importance?”

As

As he uttered the last words in a melancholy tone, a sudden rustling in the shrubbery caused him to start, and turning his head, he beheld, in a plain garb,—Eleanora! — Surprise and confusion overpowered him.—“Eleanora!” he exclaimed. “Yes, the ill-treated, the despised Eleanora, that troubled spirit which knows no rest when deprived of the man she doats on. In vain you fly me, Berthier, I will pursue you to the uttermost verge of the earth—love like mine bids defiance to time, distance, or dangers. You may shun me, you may ungratefully reject those terms which love and fortune offer, you may slight that person for which nobles sigh and sue in vain to possess,—but, by every thing sacred I swear, you shall not escape me—I will haunt you daily, hourly; you shall be mine, or never live to call another woman your’s.—This is my fixed determination, and your coldness only serves

serves to augment my passions of love, or vengeance."

"Oh, Madam," cried Lewis, "do not thus pursue an unhappy forlorn being; do not degrade yourself, your sex, and the pride of woman, by such unworthy sentiments." "Away," said she, waving her hand with vehemence, "away with your monastic, ridiculous ideas!—What is the pride of woman to me?—I own no laws but those of inclination.—You only can rule my fate—make me the happy instrument to promote your felicity, to establish your fortune, and this Eleanora, so violent; so vengeful; will be in your hands the most endearing, the most soothing companion that ever man was blest with—you alone may mould me to your wishes. Come, dearest Berthier, come, three days I have hovered round this hateful domain, hateful to me, for it enclosed you from my sight—had I not seen you in this happy hour, I
should

should have grown desperate.—Drive me not to extremities by your refusal.—Fly with me to the happy shores of Italy, there boundless pleasures shall court your acceptance—I will place my whole fortune in your hands, and be content to draw my existence from your love and generosity. Oh, Berthier! where is affection like mine to be met with.?”

“I conjure you, I beseech you, Madam,” cried Lewis, greatly agitated, “to leave me, to forget an unhappy——”
“Stop,” exclaimed she, “no more of this dismal absurd canting.—Answer me in one word, do you love Fidelia Douglas?”
“Not with a passion such as you call love, I admire and esteem her as a truly lovely and amiable young woman—I wish her happy most sincerely with a man that may deserve her.” Enough, I see passion has no share in your regards for her.—But there is another.” “Another!” repeated Lewis,

Lewis, starting. "Yes," returned she, fixing on him her large black eyes, "yes, another,—not the simple enthusiast, Caroline, but—Hermine!—who is Hermine?"

The colour forsook his cheeks—he repeated the name with an emotion he could not disguise, and was incapable of uttering another word. "*Now then,*" cried she, "I have discovered your secret, I see it in your eyes, I have a rival, an odious, detestable rival. Tell me who and what she is, where does she exist?—By every thing dear and sacred, I will find her out; think not she can escape me—she, she shall pay for all my sufferings.—Either this moment accompany me, or I swear to sacrifice her life to my revenge if you again reject me." "Her name and residence are buried in my heart; but let it content *you*, Madam, to know, that I love without hope—that insurmountable barriers are placed between that lady and me,—and though I adore her,
and

and would sacrifice my life to serve her, I have not a wish to degrade her to my level—and that the hopeless passion which you have discovered, will never be revealed to her.”

“ May all the plagues that love and vengeance can devise fall on her head!— Since she deprives me of your heart she is not guiltless in my eyes; and to wound your soul, as you torment mine, *she* shall be my victim. Once more I repeat my offer, fool, wretched fool as I am! take your choice—love, fortune, splendour, and happiness, are in your power; reject them, and the most ungovernable rage, the blackest revenge, the curse of a jealous woman’s hate, shall pursue you both.— She who values not her own life, has always the existence of others at her command—*now*, this instant, decide on *your* fate and *mine*.”

At

At that unlucky moment, as Lewis turned indignant from her fierce and terrifying gaze, a rustling was heard among the bushes. "How!" shrieked she, "am I prevented, am I betrayed!—Cold-blooded wretch, take that!"—She hastily drew a pistol from her pocket, fired at him, and fled. The ball grazed his left arm, passed among the shrubs—and a groan reached the ear of Lewis as he stood transfixed to the spot. The action had been so sudden, and the effect so instantaneous, that his senses were only recalled by a second groan. He rushed through the bushes, and found Lord E. extended on the ground, and the blood pouring in torrents from his side.

Amazed and distracted by this dreadful event, he tore open his waistcoat, and then bound his handkerchief round the wound, and ran to the house for assistance. He called the affrighted servants, and they took
his

his Lordship to his apartment, where the housekeeper attended to stop the effusion of blood, and tried to restore life which appeared to be quite gone. During the interval, before the surgeon arrived, Lewis was in a state of distraction;—to the demands of the servants, how the accident had happened, he was silent.—One of them, who had looked about the shrubbery, found a pistol, and searching for the gardener, the man declared the gates were all fast, and no one to his knowledge, had been within them that morning.—He had heard the report of the pistol, but had no idea it could proceed from any part of the garden, and therefore continued at his work, positive no person could enter or go out, without his knowledge.

This account from the gardener, led to many conjectures among the servants unfavourable to Lewis;—and as persons of their description have most commonly a decided
aversion

aversion to foreigners, what they could only suspect they determined on as a fact, and by the time the surgeon was brought, they concluded that this Frenchman, whose life had been preserved by their master's kindness, had attempted to murder him. The improbability of so much baseness and ingratitude, that could answer no purpose at all to the perpetrator of the crime, was not taken into their account;—he was a foreigner—one who nobody knew, and therefore he must be guilty. Lewis had waited for the appearance of the surgeon in agony of mind that baffled all description. The assiduous care of the old housekeeper restored Lord E. to life;—he once again respired—had opened his eyes—looked steadily for a moment on Lewis, who was kneeling by the side of the bed, seemed to make an effort to speak, but his lips only moved, and he sank into a state of weakness nearly bordering on insensibility.—The surgeon having examined the wound,
the

the pain of which had again roused Lord E. to life and feeling,—Lewis, who had attentively watched his countenance, saw but little to hope and every thing to dread, from the expression he studied;—the anguish he felt overpowered his strength, and with difficulty he made his way into the next room, where he instantly fainted.

The surgeon having finished his business, and given directions to the housekeeper, on leaving the room beheld Lewis stretched on a sofa, in the adjoining one, to all appearance lifeless;—by proper applications he was soon restored to his senses. “Who is this gentleman, so greatly affected?” asked the surgeon, softly to my Lord’s valet.—“A Frenchman his Lordship picked up in the country, brought home to his town house, very ill, and has had him attended like himself,—that’s all I know of him;—as to his being affected, *well he may*, for—” At that moment Lewis opened his eyes, and

and attempted to raise his head, the valet walked off, and the surgeon assisted him to rest on the pillow. His curiosity to know by whose hand Lord E. had received so dangerous a wound, was not a little increased by the words and manner of the valet,—he therefore waited patiently until Lewis was capable of speaking. The first words he could articulate were, “My Lord E.—the wound!—how, how is that?”—“It certainly appears to be a very dangerous one,” answered the surgeon, “but I cannot give a decisive opinion, until the next dressing, when I shall bring two gentlemen of the profession to examine it with me.” “O, Heavens!” exclaimed Lewis, faintly, “then I have caused the death of a friend and benefactor!” “The life or death of Lord E. is at present in the hands of the Almighty,—a short time, a few hours will, very probably decide the event,—and I earnestly hope your self-accusation will not be urged against you.” “I am a most
forlorn

forlorn unhappy wretch," exclaimed Lewis, "would to Heaven I had died before this dreadful business had taken place!—O, my Lord E. what a fatal—what a horrid return for your benevolence!" He threw his handkerchief over his face, and sank back in agonies that raised the compassion of the surgeon;—at the same time it appeared to him that this young man had attempted the life of his Lordship, as, from the information he had received below, only one person was known to be with him, and only one pistol had been found.

From these unfavorable appearances against Lewis, he felt himself authorized to tell the servants they must not permit the French gentleman to leave the house.—This injunction not one of them were inclined to disobey,—on the contrary, his Lordship's gentleman, who gladly assumed authority on the occasion, went immediately up stairs, accompanied by two men from

from the stables, and, with an air of insolence, told Lewis he must retire to his own bed chamber, and be guarded by those two men until the friends of his Lordship arrived.

“Guarded!” repeated Lewis, with inconceivable surprise, “guarded!—What is it you mean?” “My meaning is plain enough, I think.—My Lord is dangerously wounded—no one was with him but you, only one pistol is found, therefore who could have committed the wicked assault, but you?” “What then, do you suppose I was the assassin?” “Who else but you should be?—but it don’t signify to waste words,—proofs are against you,—and till my Lord’s relations come down, ’tis my duty to confine you;—so pray walk without any further resistance.”

“I shall make none,” returned Lewis, recovered to firmness, and the dignity of
conscious

conscious innocence, by the fellow's insolence, "I should feel happy if allowed to attend on your Lord, for whom my heart bleeds, and suffers pangs worse than death; but if you have authority to confine me, I submit to it, I only request that when the surgeons have been with his Lordship, I may be permitted to see the gentleman who has just left me."

"That's as he pleases," returned Jervis, and again hastened him to his chamber. Lewis when he entered the room, and saw the two men quietly seat themselves before him, with all the grinning impudence of office, and the satisfaction of mortifying a foreigner,—could not repress the violence of his emotions;—the recollection of the recent transactions,—the threats,—the deadly resentment, and vowed revenge of that horrid woman, who in all probability had been the murderer of Lord E.—the bitter regret which wounded his

very soul, that his Lordship had received the contents of the pistol evidently designed against him,—the flight of Eleanora,—the vengeance she had sworn against Hermine, if it were possible for her to discover the person and residence of that adored object,—all these painful and terrifying circumstances crowded upon his mind, and rendered him nearly distracted. Regardless and unmindful what colour might be given to his agitations by his observers, he walked the room, clasping his hands in agonies. “Oh, Father Francis, oh my beloved mother! behold what a wretch your mistaken kindness has made me!—I may eventually be the murderer of all I hold dear on earth! Distraction! what will become of me?”

“Why if my Lord dies, that’s easily known,” said one of the men,—“you’ll be hanged for the murder, to be sure; for you may rely upon it you shall not make
your

your escape, Mr. Frenchy." Lewis, absorbed in his own reflections, scarcely heard the man's unfeeling speech. He continued to pace the room, occasionally flinging himself into a chair, then starting up and wringing his hands in such evident distraction of mind, that the men exchanged significant nods, implying their certainty of his guilt, and observed, "What a terrible thing was a guilty conscience."

Mean time Lord E. had been restored to his senses, but was unable to articulate a single sentence.—He was observed to cast his eyes round, as if in search of some object he wished to see; but the housekeeper and Jervis, who had infused into her mind the same suspicions that Lewis had assassinated their Lord:—drew their own inferences from the looks of his Lordship that "he was anxious to know if the villain was secured."

On this presumption the latter softly said,
“ Yes, my Lord, yes, the base murderer is confined,—he’s under guard,—he’ll swing for it, if your Lordship should not recover.”
“ Aye, and if my Lord should recover, as by God’s mercy I hope he will, that villain foreigner will be hanged for the attempt; for it is one and the same thing if he tried to kill our good Lord, he’ll die for it, that’s one comfort,” joined the housekeeper.

They both saw the eyes and the features of his Lordship were greatly agitated, which doubtless must be occasioned by talking about the villain; and as he seemed to fall into a doze soon after, they chose to entertain themselves with a different subject, and drawing the curtains round the bed, partook in silence of some very fine cordial, which the good lady had brought from her stores to give some comfort to his Lordship.

In

In a few hours Mr. Paulett, the surgeon, returned, with two gentlemen of great skill. The patient's wound was examined, and they agreed that it was a very dangerous one;—and tho' the balls were extracted, yet there appeared nothing favourable to justify a hope of his recovery. Mr. Paulett, from the first probing, doubtful of the consequence, had been anxious to send information of his danger, to his Lordship's family and friends; he had already written letters, and waited only for the report of these two gentlemen, to dispatch them by express.—He enquired of the attendants to whom he should address them? The housekeeper knew not who his relations were, or where to be found.—Mr. Jervis, his Lordship's gentleman, had heard Lord Somerset, and his mother, Lady Somerset, were relatives; but he could not say whether they were in England.—Earl Belfont was a particular friend, and he believed now in London. With this vague intelligence Mr. Paulett

was obliged to be content, and sent off directly to Lord Somerset and Earl Belfont. The second inspection of the wound had so exhausted the strength of his Lordship, that he lay to all appearance lifeless, except now and then a convulsive start, and an agonizing moan, expressive of paroxysms of pain.

Mean time Mr. Paulett enquired after the French gentleman,—the supposed criminal, and was conducted to his apartment; where he found poor Lewis, leaning on a table, covering his face with his hands. He had knocked at the door, which was unlocked by one of the guards, without being seen by Lewis, so lost was he in the contemplation of his own wretchedness. The voice of kindness roused him from his reveries,—he looked up with such an expression of anguish on his countenance that the humane heart of the surgeon felt some interest for the unfortunate man, so very
unhappily

unhappily circumstanced. "I am glad," said he, tenderly, "to see you so well recovered." "Ah, Sir!" cried Lewis, with abruptness, "tell me, oh, pray tell me, how is Lord E. are there any hopes that he will recover?"

"To flatter you with fallacious hopes would be extreme folly," returned Mr. Paulett, "he is certainly in a very dangerous state." "Good Heavens!" exclaimed the former, starting from his seat, "to what misery am I reserved!—The generous, kind, benevolent Lord E. is deprived of existence; and I who ought to be the sufferer, I have the death of my benefactor to answer for!" "Stop, Sir," said Mr. Paulett; who had noticed the reciprocal malicious smiles of the men present, "stop, Sir, do not criminate yourself; I cannot believe that to you we must attribute the very unhappy event you so greatly deplore." "Yes," returned he,

H 4

"yes,

“yes, *I* am the wretched cause—if he dies, he dies by the hand of an assassin, and the pistol that wounded him, ought to have entered my heart and not his.” “Say no more, I beseech you,” cried the surgeon, “you are a stranger to our laws and customs, you may do yourself a material injury.—Every man in this country is presumptively innocent until the laws condemn him, nor is any one required to criminate himself: When called upon, truth and integrity must be your sole dependence; but beware of putting weapons into the hands of your enemies. I cannot, I will not believe you guilty, unless some proofs are substantiated and undeniable;—till then, you shall find me your friend, for I fear you are unknown and friendless, and have therefore just claims upon humanity and a feeling heart.”

“Whatever becomes of me,” cried Lewis, passionately pressing his hand, “may
Heaven

Heaven reward your charity and candour. I cannot tell you my story, but if indulged with pen and ink, I will write some circumstances for your perusal; and may Heaven have mercy on me as I will strictly adhere to truth." "I shall be much gratified by your confidence," replied Paulett, "you have already strong claims upon my compassion, I could almost venture to say upon my esteem; for if I err not in judgment, you are more entitled to pity, than an object of condemnation—more the child of error, than an associate with guilt." "I am truly wretched," said Lewis, with a sigh, "but not so criminal as appearances bespeak me." "Well," returned Paulett, "I shall send you a composing draught, and the implements for writing. I expect," added he, turning to the men, "that you treat this unfortunate gentleman with civility; 'tis our duty to believe every fellow creature free from guilt, whilst a possibility exists that he may be innocent. When

THE PEASANT OF

by God and the laws, we
for him as becomes men
—till then he has claims
as well as mercy.”

who had lived with the late
some years before his death,
it to respect the character
, (as they call every gentle-
mility, whether physician, sur-
geon, in that country) and
by his remonstrance they
comply with his injunctions.

unholy state we are com-
e Elworth-Hall, and look
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CHAP.

CHAP. XXIX.

WE left Lord Douglas, his brother, and the amiable Fidelia proceeding on their way to the South of France. It was the desire of his Lordship to rest a few weeks in Paris; but though every possible accommodation was procured for him, and they travelled exceeding short stages, the exercise, however gentle, seemed too much for his debilitated frame to support—and when they arrived at Paris, he was so exhausted by fatigue that Mr. Douglas prevailed upon him to have medical assistance.

For

For a few days he appeared to get better; but the sixth day after his arrival, a sudden and violent attack of the gout in his stomach and head carried him off in sixteen hours. The surprise and grief of his brother, now Lord Douglas, and the affectionate Fidelia, was surpassing shew, and such as is rarely felt by heirs to titles and fortune. But the late reconciliation had infused much tenderness into the hearts of both. Their minds, still oppressed by the recent death of a son and brother, had by this event, every wound fresh opened, and every sorrowing idea brought forth with a double portion of anguish.

They had now to prepare for the melancholy ceremony of conveying the corpse to England, to be deposited in the family vault. The body was embalmed, and every mark of respect and affection was visible in the expensive and mournful preparations;
and

and exactly in six weeks from the time they had left England, they returned to Rose Vale, with the cold remains of its former possessor. Here Lord Douglas left his daughter with the housekeeper, whilst he proceeded on to Nutwell Park, the family seat in Worcestershire.

Fidelia, left to solitude and reflection, eagerly seized the opportunity to write a long and circumstantial letter to her beloved Hermine; and not doubting of her arrival in England, addressed it to Portland-Place. She detailed the afflicting event of her brother's death, the strange disappearance of Lewis, and the letter written by Eleanora, which she was sure had accelerated it. All these circumstances made so greatly against the honour and gratitude of Berthier, that however her heart felt inclined to think favourably of him, her judgment revolted; and his continued silence seemed to justify the severe interpretation

tation of her father, who had given up every kind thought of him, and condemned him as worthless, profligate, deceptive, and ungrateful.

“ Yet,” added Fidelia, “ in spite of circumstances so strong, there are times when I think it impossible that Berthier, once so worthy as to deserve the esteem of Hermine, and the protection of the good Father Francis, who in the opinion of my dear lamented brother, was the soul of integrity and honour, could so rapidly plunge into vice, so fatally wound the heart of poor Frederic, and destroy the peace of a family who loved and wished to serve him. No, my dear Hermine, he could not have arrived at such a climax of wickedness all at once!—Either he must have long been a consummate hypocrite, enslaved by the arts of that most abandoned of women, or there is a mystery in his fate which only time can elucidate. Oh, that the development

velopement may exonerate him from blame! —Extravagant as the wish seems to be, I cannot discourage it." She then proceeded to narrate their journey, the death of Lord Douglas, and other events of less consequence, requesting her beloved friend to write by the return of the post.

This letter reached Hermine two days after the one in which she had tacitly given hope to Lord Somerset, and was resolutely engaged in admiring his great merit and many amiable qualities. The superscription in the well known hand of her dear Fidelia, gave Hermine the most sensible delight, but the contents were far from giving her a continuance of it; on the contrary, the strange conduct of Lewis gave but too much the colour of truth, to the story related by Miss Snarler:—she could no longer doubt but the French gallant of Lord E's, quondam mistress, must be the unworthy Berthier. Tears followed the conviction,
—" Ah!"

—“ Ah !” said she, deeply sighing, “ the world and its allurements have drawn aside, and corrupted one of the best and most ingenuous of human hearts !—Deception made no part of his natural character; but thrown among unprincipled beings, the very amiability of his disposition has contributed to his ruin, and in obliging others he has lost himself ! Poor Lewis !—Happy Agnes ! you are unconscious of his errors, may he live to repent and amend !”

It was some hours before Hermine could assume sufficient composure to enter her aunt's dressing room, and present her Fidelia's letter. The comments of Lady Somerset, and their mutual sorrow for the fall of Lewis, which seemed now unquestionably confirmed, we shall not repeat. The joy which Hermine would otherwise have felt unalloyed, at the happy prospects of Fidelia, received considerable abatement from the painful certainty that Lewis was

no

no longer entitled to her esteem, no longer worthy of the countenance of her friends. She strove to banish him from her thoughts; but could not refrain from exclaiming,—“ Ah! had it been his happy lot to have fallen in the way of Lord Somerset, poor Lewis would have been a different being, he would never have swerved from virtue!”

Lady Somerset kissed the hand of her niece,—“ My heart thanks you, my love, for this gratifying compliment to my son; while I as sincerely regret as you do that Berthier had not accompanied me from Florence to Ardenne Forest, when, freed from that debasing fascination which reigns among too many of the Italian women, he might with us have had all his virtues confirmed, and proved a valuable member of society. Who knows,” added she, “ whether Lord Somerset may not obtain some intelligence of him yet,—If he can be found, if he has not left England with that
Circe,

Circe, perhaps it may not be too late to restore him to himself, and those who wish to serve him." Hermine sighed and shook her head—the wish, and the hope, appeared to her unavailing and forlorn; she had no doubt but he was in the toils of Eleanora, and by this time returned to Florence.

Lord Somerset, who had vainly sought to acquire information relative to the story of Miss Snarler, was sorry to hear her account of the affair was in general circulation. The only place from whence he might have gleaned the truth was at Lord E's. but as he knew his Lordship had left town, he did not feel it a justifiable step to interrogate his servants relative to their Lord's private affairs. Thus they remained undecided what credit should be given to Miss Snarler, and a general report, against their own more favourable opinion of Lewis, until this fatal letter from Fidelia confirmed it past a doubt.

If

If any thing could have exalted the character of Lord Somerset in the eyes of Hermine, it would have been the candour and humanity of his judgment when he had read the letter. "I have no doubt," said he, "strong as appearances are against this young man, that he is more unhappy than culpable.—He was new to the world,—very young in his knowledge of mankind,—still less acquainted with women,—and most of all unacquainted with the arts of the Italians. Such a mind, unadulterated by vice; unsuspicious of evil, and suddenly fascinated by a most captivating woman,—Ah! ladies, much may be said on the side of compassion, for this poor culprit." "But," said Lady Somerset, hastily, "can any plea be urged in his behalf, for his ungrateful desertion of Frederic Douglas?—for his unaccountable silence,—his total neglect of that family who so warmly patronized him?" "The very circumstances you mention," returned his Lordship, "as aggravations

gravations of his guilt, appear to me most strongly in his favour.—I cannot credit so much depravity in human nature, as that apparent ingratitude stamps upon his character.” “What then do you believe?” “That some uncontrollable events leave him not master of himself;—that there is a mystery which hangs over him, from which he cannot emerge. I well know what women of such strong passions as this *Eleanora* is reported to be, are capable of;—and the dark schemes,—the strange contrivances women of her stamp, and of her country, are frequently guilty of, to carry any point on which they have placed their hearts.—In short, however appearances are against this young man, I cannot believe him so lost, as report and malice join to represent him.” “Whatever he may be,” cried *Hermine*, her eyes sparkling with the enthusiasm of her feelings, “your’s, I am sure, is the most liberal of human hearts. That candour which inclines you to judge
thus

thus favourably, when a combination of circumstances are so forcibly urged against this unhappy young man, bespeaks a heart and mind replete with every virtue. Heaven grant that such a noble confidence may be justified by the event!" The delighted Lord Somerset kissed her hand in rapturous silence.—Lady Somerset shed tears of joy, and for a few moments not a word was uttered on either side. Hermine, who had been hurried by the enthusiasm of the moment, into a transport she blushed to recollect when she saw its effects, was the first to recover; and drawing her hand gently from the impassioned grasp of her lover, she rose much confused. "I will retire to comply with the request of my friend,—to answer her letter by the return of post." Then bowing gracefully, she hastened to her apartment. If she was delighted with the liberal sentiments of Lord Somerset, she was shocked that she had been betrayed by her emotions, so warmly
to

to praise him; and though the character of her noble cousin rose upon her every hour, and commanded her esteem, yet she did not feel that affection which she supposed a young woman usually felt for the man to whom she was to be united. In short, Hermine, though educated in a convent, had imbibed from many of the boarders, that romantic idea, that without a prepossessing affection, no young woman could be happy in a marriage state;—and this attachment she did not feel for Lord Somerset, though she allowed he was the most amiable man she had ever seen or heard of. But what were the nature of her sentiments for Lewis? The question recurred to her on recollecting how she had been charmed by her cousin's favourable opinion of him. “I certainly do regard him,” said she, with affection and gratitude, “he appeared to me to be one of the best young men in the world, but yet I must allow there is a superiority in
Lord

Lord Somerset, that overshadows the merits of poor Lewis. But had Lewis been well born,—well educated, and a worthy tutor had superintended his morals and manners; sure I am that he would not have fallen behind his Lordship in those admirable qualities that so eminently distinguish him. Lewis, in the Forest of Ardenne, was as superior to his companions, as my Lord may be to him, and that solely by the gifts of nature, and the example of virtuous parents. The merit of Lewis then was more immediately his own, and deserved esteem and cultivation. And if he has fallen into reproachful errors, he was the child of nature, and easily the dupe, or victim, of artful wicked persons. Generous Lord Somerset! like you, I will hold *my judgment* unwarped by appearances, and hope the developement may do equal honour to our penetration and our hearts."

From

From this hour Hermine unconsciously encouraged a preference for Lord Somerset, which she thought due to his uncommon merit; and whilst she secretly lamented that *love* had no share in *that preference*, such as she ought to have for the man she *must certainly marry*, she every moment grew more attached to him; which was strengthened by the very circumstance of defending an object, who had once been more than indifferent to her,—though pride of birth had blinded her to the nature of her feelings, and called that preferable regard by the deceptive title of *gratitude*. She sat down to write, whilst Lady Somerset was warmly congratulating her son on his happy prospects with his charming cousin.

“To-morrow,” said she, “my chaplain is to bring his opinion with respect to opening the packet confided to her care till a certain period. I know her sacred regard for the will of him who gave her being, is
such,

such, that neither persuasion nor argument will induce her to marry you, until the important, to her *important*, (whatever its contents may be) packet is opened, and her mind satisfied as to the influence it ought to hold over her conduct." "Ah!" said Lord Somerset, "how must I dread the inspection, since from the character of the late Count M****, and his unqualified and unjust aversion to our family, it seems but too probable, that he will forbid that union on which my happiness hangs suspended." "Do not distress your mind by fear or anxiety; I have better hopes, for a great change in his conduct and sentiments had evidently taken place previous to his quitting Paris."

Lady Somerset had scarcely uttered the last words before her chaplain was announced. Lord Somerset having been educated a protestant, seldom attended in the room when this gentleman came to visit

his mother, although he had the highest respect for him. Lady Somerset was no bigot, her good sense, and the example of her late Lord, had long since divested her of all her religious prejudices; and though born and educated as a catholic, she still preserved her faith and mode of worship unmixed with absurd ceremonies or uncharitable distinctions. The worthy man who she called her chaplain, not her confessor, was deservedly esteemed by all who knew him; and had preserved inviolate the engagement he had made to Lord Somerset, never to interfere by words or actions with the regulations of his family. In consequence of this promise he never sought an intimacy with the present Lord, though he was charmed to observe in so young a man, a rectitude of mind, and a line of conduct, very opposite to the fashionable manners of the age. Thus, though a mutual regard subsisted between them, they seldom met, but at table; and it had been customary
for

for his Lordship to retire soon after his entrance, if they chanced to meet any other time. But at this period his Lordship was desirous of knowing his opinion. With great emotion he heard him say,—“That as the late Count M**** could not foresee the meeting between his daughter and her aunt, as his resentment appeared to be subdued, and repentance taken place of unjust prejudices—as his sudden death had possibly prevented an alteration in his plans, and the young lady might unconsciously err, if ignorant of his wish and intentions respecting her conduct—on the maturest deliberation therefore, he thought her justified in opening the packet; nor could she charge herself with any breach of duty in quitting the convent, as *that residence* was chosen for her because of its proximity to the abbey he had fixed upon as an asylum for himself—but circumstances being so materially changed by his death, she certainly was justified in placing herself under

the care of her aunt, and the sooner she opened her packet, the better she would be enabled to decide in what manner to act accordant to the will of her parent."

Lord Somerset now quitted the room greatly agitated, as the happiness of *his* future life depended on the important contents of this packet; mean time Lady Somerset committed the good man's opinion to paper and sent it up to Hermine. She was not perfectly at ease herself; the strong and lasting aversion of the Count towards her and the late Lord Somerset, made her doubtful whether that resentment had not been extended beyond the grave—her only glimmering of hope arose from his conviction of the cruelty and injustice of those evils he had inflicted on the unfortunate Countess, and trusting that his bitter repentance of those irremediable wrongs towards her, would influence him to extend his regrets, and desire of reparation, for his unjustifiable

unjustifiable conduct and aversion to her relatives and friends. She equally wished for, and dreaded, the developement, since it must have the strongest influence to govern the future destiny of her son—that son, whose happiness was the sole object that engrossed every desire of her soul, and gave to life its only charm.

Hermine had not closed her long letter to Fidelia, when she received the paper from her aunt. She had been greatly agitated in remarking on the conduct and character of Lewis, yet freely joined in the hope of her friend, that he might yet be exonerated from one of the heaviest charges against him — his ungrateful desertion of poor Frederic. She glanced her eyes over the opinion of the good chaplain, and felt her heart relieved of much doubt and uneasiness, from the indecision of her own mind on a point of such consequence; she nevertheless trembled for the event, and

had not courage to break the seals, but in the supporting presence of her aunt.— With an unsteady hand, she sealed and addressed her letter,—“ Lest,” said she, sighing, “ I should be incapable of doing it, from what I have to learn of my duty to the sacred commands of a parent.”

With the mysterious packet in her hand, she walked to her aunt’s dressing room—the emotions she endured were legible in her countenance. Lady Somerset rose and embraced her,—“ My beloved girl, resume that energy natural to your character.— Remember that you have relations who love and will protect you;—happily, also, you have an independance to which your father was a stranger, and that circumstance may tend to a material change of measures. Compose your spirits, I will give orders to admit no visitors, that we may not be broken in upon.” The priest rose to take leave. “ No, my good Sir,” said

said Hermine, "you must not leave us—you know our family secrets, your presence will give me courage, and 'tis *you* that I would request to read the will of my beloved father.—For," added she, turning to her aunt, "whatever errors he might be drawn into, however cruel and unjust towards my ever dear and lamented mother, and unjustifiable in his conduct and hatred to her family, it becomes me to acknowledge, that from the first day when I was torn from the arms of that dear mother, it appeared to be the chief wish of his life to make me happy, and by his tender affection atone for his cruelty in depriving me of so great a blessing." Lady Somerset bowed her head with a look of approbation; and the seals being broken, the following preamble was read by the priest.

"Should it be the will of our Almighty Father to spare my sinful life, that I may have a longer time for repentance, till the
 I 4 period

period when my beloved, but much injured child shall attain the age of one-and-twenty, we shall then part for ever; — and this packet will be opened, I trust, in the presence of Lord and Lady Somerset, to whose care, by the will of her maternal grandfather, she ought to have been confided on the death of her martyred mother. But this was prevented by an imprecation, uttered in a fit of desperation, to interdict every kind of intercourse between my wife and her family, and causing her at the same time to take a solemn oath, (under the penalty of having her child torn from her, if she refused to comply,) that she would never directly or indirectly correspond with any of her family, or acquaintance of her late father's,—that she would not inform her child of my name or residence,—nor that she had any one relation, or any dependance in the world, until the child should arrive at the above age.

“ This

“This oath dictated by the most unjustifiable hatred, and for the most wicked purposes, I obliged the suffering angel to make in my presence, with the most solemn asseverations that she would strictly adhere to the very spirit of her vow;—and under all her accumulated wrongs and cruel treatment, to the very hour, when urged by the most diabolical of men, I tore her darling child from her arms, and struck the deadly blow to her heart—to that dreadful hour she preserved her integrity inviolate. Those vows—those imprecations have kept my much wronged Hermine in ignorance of all her connexions;—and still hold me back from informing her that she has an uncle and aunt in Lord and Lady Somerset, now in England, who were intended as the guardians of her property and person. But by a petition artfully drawn up, I imposed a false representation on my sovereign,—obtained an order to set aside that part of the will, and to be appointed sole guardian

of both, until she was of age. And how I have wronged that trust I shudder to acknowledge!—almost every shilling of my child's fortune has been lavished on an abandoned woman, and an infamous villain, in whose hands I have been made an instrument to commit the most atrocious wickedness.

“ I am deservedly punished,—but alas! I can make no reparation.—The angel I have murdered has recorded all her wrongs against me in Heaven;—my child,—my dearly beloved child has been robbed of her property,—her paternal right, and defrauded of that fortune entrusted to me; as her guardian. Every tender word,—every compassionating look, is a reproach that stabs me to the soul;—yet my tongue is tied,—my oaths impose on me a painful silence, nor have I resolution to unmask myself entirely,—to acknowledge the extent of my wickedness, and cause my dear
Hermine

Merraine to shrink with horror from her unworthy parent.

“ Too late awakened from the horrid dream of pleasure, and the delirium of my senses,—struck to the soul with a conviction of my crimes,—overwhelmed by remorse,—pursued by my creditors,—in dread of justice,—without friends, fortune, or reputation,—I fly from the world to a remote—solitary spot, where alone I can hope by penance and repentance, to obtain the mercy of Heaven, and be cleansed from my sins by the severe contrition that bows me to the earth, the most wretched of mankind. Near the place I have chosen for my residence is a convent, in which a relation of mine presides as Abbess to the community.

“ I know her not personally, but the excellence of her character I have often heard spoken of, and under her care I will place

place my dear Hermine, as the vicinity to the abbey will enable me to enjoy sometimes the society of my child, until the period arrives, when I must deliver her up to those worthy relatives, whose virtues alone made me their enemy.

“Should it please Heaven to call me from hence before she is one-and-twenty, my dear Hermine will then be free,—and *I* at liberty, on my death-bed, to give her this packet, which will unfold to her the mystery which hangs over her future destiny. From the wreck of her fortune I have saved a sufficiency for her support, whether *I* live or die, until the time when she will be able to claim the protection of her aunt.

“And now my dearly beloved Hermine, as when you read the enclosed papers, the hand that writes will be cold, and the heart that throbs with remorse
and

and repentance, will cease to beat,—do not detest the memory, though you must shudder at the crimes, of him, who has been the most cruel of husbands,—the most unworthy of fathers,—and the most fraudulent of guardians. Great have been my crimes,—bitter is my punishment;—a self convicted criminal,—trembling before his righteous judge, and undeserving of forgiveness. — Pray for the repose of my soul, and supplicate the divine mercy for your most truly repentant,—wretched, but most affectionate father,

“ MONTAUBERT.”

During the reading of this preamble, poor Hermine had been drowned in tears; nor could Lady Somerset suppress audible proofs of the compassion she felt for the unhappy writer.—Alarmed at the convulsive sobs of her niece, she advised her to defer inspecting the enclosed papers until she was
more

more composed. "You are now satisfied, my love," said she, "that you have been guilty of no error, in placing yourself under my protection, since 'tis very evident, the sudden termination of the poor Count's sorrows alone, prevented him from giving you this packet, to be opened after his death." "I will thankfully take your considerate advice, Madam," returned Hermine, "for, indeed, at present I am unfit to investigate this fearful story any farther." The clergyman gave up the papers, and, after a few consolatory remarks, took his leave.

Scarce had he left the house, the tears still flowing down the cheeks of Hermine, when the express from Elworth-Hall arrived, with letters to Lord and Lady Somerset. Extremely surprised, her Ladyship hastily tore open the letter addressed to her, and after perusing a few lines, her colour varying every moment, she suddenly exclaimed,

claimed, "Good Heaven!—Lord E. assassinated,—a French gentleman, called Berthier, in custody!" "Who,—what, Berthier?—Berthier in custody!" cried Hermine, starting up. "My dear niece, I am sorry my imprudent surprise has given you this alarm,—you must now read the whole. —I am inconceivably astonished how Berthier could be at Elworth-Hall;—and that he can have arrived at such a climax of wickedness as to turn assassin, is to me quite incomprehensible."

Hermine ran over the contents of the letter, her face pale, and every limb trembling;—no words could speak the anguish she felt, and she was just sinking from her chair, as Lord Somerset entered and caught her in his arms,—he had an open letter in his hand. Terrified at her situation, his worst fears darted into his mind, and, forgetful at the moment of the letters just received, he concluded her disorder was the consequence.

consequence of some terrible interdictions expressed in her father's papers.

Though overpowered for the moment, she did not lose her senses, but quickly recovered, when some drops were given to her by her aunt. "Ah!" cried Lord Somerset, "what have I to dread from this sudden indisposition?" — Hermine could not speak. "We have, indeed, been greatly shocked," answered her Ladyship, "and our hearts softened by recent sorrows, no wonder poor Hermine was overcome by the information these letters contain." "Letters!" repeated Lord Somerset, "Heavens! I had forgot the express and every thing relative to it, when I beheld the situation of my dearest Hermine, altho' I came here purposely to prepare you for the surprise, not knowing you were already acquainted with the melancholy business." "You will instantly go down, my son," said Lady Somerset, "for
however.

however estranged from each other by casual neglect, more than from want of regard on either side, I believe, yet we are assuredly his nearest relatives;—and, were you not connected by ties of blood, humanity demands your attentions at such a period as this.” “Undoubtedly,” replied he, “I mean to hasten to Elworth-Hall with all speed.—But, forgive me if at such a moment I appear to be selfish,—tell me, may I, dare I hope, the dreaded packet contains nothing inimical to my presumptuous wishes?”

Still Hermine was silent, her bosom overcharged by a variety of painful emotions. “From the little we have read,” answered her Ladyship, “I believe I am warranted to give you full confidence, that there are no interdictions which can militate against our hoped for happiness; since the poor Count was sensible of his injustice to our family, and recommends his darling child

child to my protection." "I am satisfied," cried he, in an ecstasy, kissing a hand of the passive Hermine, "I will instantly leave town, to attend Lord E. and investigate this strange affair." "You see," observed Lady Somerset, "that Berthier is again implicated." "I will form no opinion, nor draw any conclusion from circumstances, until I am on the spot," returned he. "Take care of your health, my charming cousin," turning to Hermine, "I adore your sensibility,—but check it, I beseech you, or it will prove injurious to your peace." "I feel your kindness in its fullest extent," replied she, "and will endeavour to conquer this weakness." With a tender adieu he then hastily left the room, and was soon on the road to Elworth-Hall. We shall now leave Lady Somerset soothing her beloved niece, and return to Lord E's. where an unexpected change had taken place, to the infinite joy of our poor peasant.

CHAP.

CHAP. XXX.

WHEN we quitted Elworth-Hall it was with the melancholy presage of a fatal termination to the life of Lord E.—Most happily, on the evening of that day some favorable symptoms appeared, which gave hope that as none of the vital parts being injured, there was a probability of his Lordship's recovery.—But as there was still much fever, this gleam of hope would not directly justify confidence, for which reason the surgeons suspended an avowal of their present opinion, anxiously waiting the approach

proach of the next morning, when they flattered themselves it would be more decisive.

Lewis mean time endured the most painful anxiety. His health was much affected by his present sufferings,—the disorder of the mind had its concomitant effects on the body, and the task he had undertaken of writing a detail of events, was more than he could perform. - Mr. Paulett, desirous of giving ease to his mind, ventured a hope that appearances had taken a favourable turn with Lord-E. which he wished might be confirmed, though he dared not absolutely rely on them, This slender hope did more for the invalid than the whole college of physicians could have done;—and the joy that sparkled in his eyes, convinced Mr. Paulett that this young man was less criminal than it was supposed.

Doubt, hope, and fear agitated poor Lewis through the night, and when the day dawned,

dawned, he besought one of his guards to enquire of their Lord's situation. These men, now grown more civilized, readily complied. Mr. Paulett, who had watched all night, sent word his Lordship was by no means worse, and that he should soon visit Lewis, and expected to find *him much better*.

To the great satisfaction of the surgeons, on inspection that morning, the wound wore a promising aspect. His Lordship had spoken a few words,—articulately had named Berthier. "Where is Berthier?" asked he faintly. The surgeon begged he would not talk;—he submitted, but when alone with the housekeeper, he again repeated the question. "Is he in the house?" "O, yes, my Lord, safely locked up, I assure you." "I wish to see him, I must see him." The housekeeper was a little flurried by this request; but his Lordship repeating "*I must see him,*
go,

go, go," she ventured to send the valet to Mr. Paulett with his Lordship's requisition.

Mr. Paulett was with Lewis, whose fever still hung upon him. He received the message with equal surprise and pleasure. Lewis would have sprung out of the room in a moment had he not been restrained—the good natured surgeon undertook for his visit in the evening, should my Lord appear able to bear it, till then he would convey all that was necessary to be said on either side. He was perfectly right, for the transports of Lewis were almost ungovernable, in being thus kindly asked for; and after Mr. Paulett had talked him into composure, he thought fit on his own authority to dismiss his guards.—“I will be answerable for him that he shall not leave the house. I dare confide in you,” said he to Lewis, “that you will not quit your apartment, until I am your conductor.” He assented without any reluctance to this request,

request, and promised to be guided by him. We shall only add, that the fifth day after Lord E. was wounded, his surgeons pronounced they had no doubts of a progressive recovery, and on this day Lewis was permitted to visit him.

Their joy was great, but Lewis could not suppress his emotions;—he dropped on his knees, “Ah! my Lord, all this you have suffered for me,—can you forgive me?”—“I have nothing to forgive.—You have committed no fault,” replied his Lordship, “accident directed the ball into the right channel,—I had no right to intrude, much less meanly to listen to a conversation intended to be private;—’tis you that must pardon me, for an unjustifiable curiosity.” Lewis kissed his hand, “Heaven be witness for me,” said he, “how gladly I would have received the ball, to have spared you such acute misery.” “Well, enough on this subject,” said Mr. Paulett, “your interview

terview must be very short, if you are in the pathetic mood." "Permit me to sit here," returned Lewis, "and I will be every thing you wish me to be." "Dumb then, if you please, without I free you from the painful restraint." "I obey," said Lewis.

In the evening arrived Lord Somerset. Mr. Paulett received him and related all the occurrences that had induced him to send off an express, and the happy and little expected change that had taken place since. Lord Somerset expressed great pleasure in the hoped for convalescence of Lord E. and asked if they had any knowledge or suspicion of the person who had been guilty of such an atrocious deed. "I have not," answered Mr. Paulett, "but I believe the person is not unknown to his Lordship and Mr. Berthier." "What, then Berthier is not guilty, tho' you had cause to suspect him?" "Appearances were

were against him, but he is undoubtedly innocent, and has suffered much both in body and mind." "I am sincerely rejoiced that he is acquitted of an action so base," returned Lord Somerset; "though I know him not personally, I am interested for him. But have the goodness to announce me; and if not inconvenient to Lord E. I shall be happy to see him."—Mr. Paulett withdrew, but quickly returned to conduct his Lordship to the sick chamber.

The moment Lewis heard the name of Lord Somerset, he was thrown into an agitation he found it impossible to disguise, he rose therefore to retire. "You will not go, Berthier; did you not wish for the return of that family to England?—As you know not Lord Somerset, let me introduce you." "Excuse me, my Lord," faltered out Lewis, "for the present, I will, with your leave, withdraw." "As you please," returned Lord E. and for a moment a sus-
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picion not favourable to Lewis crossed his mind, for he knew nothing of this young man, but from his own story. But this suspicion he endeavoured to dismiss from his bosom, for the ingenuous countenance of Lewis, and his artless manners, spake in his favour, and engaged confidence and a candid judgment.

The two Lords met with a reciprocity of regard; the character of Lord Somerset, though but young, and scarcely established, had entitled him to respect. Lord E. was by some years the elder, but had not been equally fortunate with his relation in having parents of fine sense, elegant manners, and almost unexampled morals; with the advantage of a worthy tutor to cultivate the germ of virtue early planted in the heart by parental tenderness. Far different had been the education of Lord E. fashionable manners, and common place politeness, family pride, and a sacrifice to the
graces,

graces, were the lessons daily inculcated; and had not nature given him feelings of humanity, a good understanding, and a heart, though warped by fashion, yet not corrupted by dissipation, this young man had been lost in the vortex of vice, without having by inclination, any very censurable propensities. A sick bed is a never-failing monitor, and Lord E. had profited by its just representations.

He received Lord Somerset with unfeigned pleasure; and after mutual civilities had passed, the latter asked, if he had any knowledge of the person who had wounded him. "You must spare me on that subject for the present, since my reply will draw on a long and shameful detail that I am unequal to; but some future time I shall be perfectly unreserved." "At your own pleasure," returned Lord Somerset, "be assured I have no impertinent curiosity to gratify.—But, is there not a

French gentleman with you called Berthier?" Lord E. answered in the affirmative, adding,—“ And I believe a very worthy young man.” “ *I hope so,*” said Lord Somerset, “ for the ladies of my family are very much interested for him.” “ Ladies!” repeated Lord E. “ Yes, and on that head I have a long story to tell you another time; now I shall only inform you that my mother has recovered a niece, the charming daughter of a beloved sister, whose parents died in France. Both this young lady and my mother knew Mr. Berthier abroad. Since we came to England some very unfavourable reports have reached us to his disadvantage, we shall be happy to have them contradicted.” “ This young man is deeply implicated in the story I have to tell you,” returned Lord E. “ I have heard him mention Lady Somerset with much respect, and it was *partly* on his account, that I left my card at your door.”

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"Pray say no more," said Lord Somerset, "I see you are fatigued, let me withdraw for the present. May I be permitted mean time to see Mr. Berthier?" "I can have no possible objection." — "Well then," returned he, "I will request Mr. Paulett to be the medium of introduction. Two or three hours rest will be of service to you." Lord Somerset, at his own desire, was shewn into the library; and Mr. Paulett departed in quest of Lewis. He found him deeply musing, in a dejected posture; he started, and was much confused on receiving the message, but presently recovering, promised to wait on his Lordship in ten minutes.

When alone, he took himself to task for the emotions that disturbed him, and the reluctance he felt to an interview with Lord Somerset, when he had so long been wishing for the family's return. "I shall hear of the *Lady Hermine*, I hope;—now

among the great world, perhaps she has forgot the humble wood-cutter,—but no, I do her injustice,—she is too good to be proud, and condescended to own an interest in my fortunes. Unfortunately I have not justified her expectations;—circumstances I could not controul, have ruled my fate, but I am not, I hope, so culpable as I may appear to be.” A little revived by this hope, and the confidence it inspired, he descended to the library, with a resolution that all vanished at the moment he beheld Lord Somerset. Struck by his personal attractions, and an air of dignity so like to Hermine’s, “ Ah !” thought he, “ here is her kindred soul !”

His Lordship advanced to meet him with the utmost complacency of countenance, and a polite apology for his wish to be introduced to him. Lewis, though he was abashed, made a reply that pleased Lord Somerset, who instantly announced
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the anxiety of his mother, and her charming niece, at his absence from town on their return to England. He was too delicate to hint at any unpleasant reports, but Lewis would not avail himself of this silence. He frankly acknowledged the pain it had given him, that by events in which his inclination had no share, he had undoubtedly appeared in a very ungrateful point of view to the two families, whom of all others were most dear to him, and to whom he must ever be under unreturnable obligations. "But," added he, "those events were of a complexion so strange and romantic, that had not Heaven graciously preserved the life of my Lord E. I do not believe I should ever have ventured to relate them, lest my veracity should be questioned by the detail."

Lord Somerset, who had been informed of the humble birth and mean occupation of the peasant, was exceedingly surprised at

his figure;—an air so gentlemanly, and language so appropriate. He too fell into the common error with all those who knew the forest wood-cutter,—that it was impossible for nature to have done so much for one so meanly born.—As if nature made any distinction in *her* children, or if the formation of minds was fashioned appropriate to the rank of their parents. Lord Somerset with sentiments the most liberal, and a heart glowing with benevolence, had yet one shade in his character,—family pride;—and this cherished distinction gave him an air of haughtiness that was foreign to his disposition, for he had too much good sense to despise others who were less fortunate than himself, though he was not insensible to his own advantages.—But he certainly did believe, that in general, poverty of sentiment was attached to poverty of birth, and that lowliness of situation, and want of education, must ever impede a man from a gentlemanly appearance, and a certain

tain propriety in manner and expression, exclusively appropriated to fashion and to cultivation.

With these ideas his Lordship beheld Lewis with astonishment, as he thought little of what information he could profit by in a monastery, or the short time he had been a companion to young Douglas. Our peasant was not unobservant of the surprise he excited, and modestly waited the momentary pause made by Lord Somerset, who recovering, expressed his great satisfaction on the favourable change in Lord E's. health, adding, "Will you allow me to ask what occasioned your sudden disappearance from the family of Mr. Douglas, which gave so much pain to your friends?"

Lewis felt extremely awkward in being the hero of his own tale, particularly as the circumstances must have an air of implied

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vanity in the relation;—but it was an imposed duty to exculpate himself, and try to recover the good opinion of his friends. This consideration overruled his delicacy, and he entered upon his story from the hour he was betrayed into the power of Eleanora, until her sudden appearance in the shrubbery;—concluding with her intended design against his life, which unfortunately took effect upon Lord E. whose situation among the trees he till then was unacquainted with. Lewis made but one reserve, which was the name of Hermine being in any shape implicated in the vowed revenge of Eleanora.

Lord Somerset listened with surprise and indignation,—not that he wondered at any excesses of a profligate Italian courtesan, as such desperate steps were but too common abroad; but he did not suppose it could be carried into effect in England to such an extent. “I heartily congratulate

tulate your escape from this abandoned woman, but pray has no enquiry been made after her?"

"I believe not," answered Lewis, "the confusion of the moment so completely engaged me, that I observed not how, or which way she fled. The dangerous state of Lord E's wound affected my health, and rendered me careless of life,—I was supposed to be guilty;—to avow my innocence, and accuse a woman of a deed so atrocious, would avail me nothing among the servants, as the gardener had averred no one could enter or depart from the grounds without his knowledge." "I am sorry she has thus escaped," returned his Lordship,—“a creature so desperate and revengeful, is too dangerous to be left a free agent; and I think Lord E. should be consulted on the subject.” “Hitherto,” said Lewis, “he has not been permitted to hold a conversation, and I have not re-
verted

verted to the unfortunate event, more than to regret my life should have been saved at the hazard of his."

"Horrid wretch as she is," cried Lord Somerset, "I much fear her wicked machinations will not end here unless she is secured.—I am truly glad to understand by your narrative, that you are wholly exonerated from the suspicion of deserting your friends;—indeed it would be difficult to believe you culpable after seeing and hearing you." Lewis bowed respectfully.—"Your Lordship does me great honour, it shall be the study of my life to deserve the good opinion of my friends."

"I doubt it not," returned his Lordship, "and you have friends who will exert themselves to serve you." He then told Lewis of the death of Lord Douglas, and the situation of the family. Lewis could feel no regret for a man he knew not, on
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the contrary, he was pleased that Mr. Douglas and the amiable Fidelia had their power enlarged to do good, as he well knew they had the inclination.

When they separated Lord Somerset retired to write to his mother, and not a little delighted that he should communicate to his charming cousin such intelligence as would restore Lewis to her favour. As to any idea of a more than friendly regard existing between Hermine and the young peasant, it never entered his head. The immeasurable distance which birth and fortune had placed between them, precluded every idea of that kind, and he felt desirous to serve Lewis, because there seemed a debt of gratitude due to those who had so kindly afforded shelter to Hermine and her unhappy parent.

Lewis meantime was occupied in retracing the person, figure, and language of
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Lord Somerset to his mind's eye;—Was it possible for Hermine to live in the same house with Lord Somerset, and not to admire—to love him?—Was he not the most elegant, the most pleasing man he had ever beheld?—“Yes,” said he, with a half-suppressed sigh, “yes, he is indeed,—at least he appears to be, worthy even of Hermine,—they seem born for each other, and all that is left for me, is to pray for their mutual happiness!” The threat of Eleanora then recurred to him,—“Good Heaven!” exclaimed he, “should that wretch trace out that Lady Hermine is the same she dared to denounce vengeance on, what crimes may not such a woman commit, and I, miserable as I am, *I* may be the cause.—What a fate is mine,—all who have been concerned in my destiny have been sufferers thro’ me, though innocent as to intention!—I will fly to Lord E. though reluctant to have that woman secured and myself her accuser;—what is to be

be considered of her fate, or of my feelings, when put in competition with the life of the Lady Hermine!—O!” cried he, in an agony, “delicacy, lest my presumptuous sentiments might appear disclosed to Lord E. and again to Lord Somerset, may eventually be the destruction of that adored lady!”

The thought was insupportable!—He hastened to Lord E’s apartment, who was just awakened, and in a few confused words repeated the threats of the vile Eleanora. “How!” cried his Lordship, “is the Hermine, whom I heard that woman denounce as her victim, is she the niece of Lady Somerset?” With downcast eyes Lewis replied in the affirmative. Lord E. observed his confusion, “You have not been candid with me, Mr. Berthier, I believe,—but I have no right to pry into your secrets.” “My Lord,” answered Lewis, stung to the soul by these words,
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“my Lord; I have no secrets, not a thought of my heart but what I dare lay before you;—for you are too generous to condemn involuntary sentiments, however presumptuous, when they have been confined to my own bosom, and which, but to you, will never be disclosed to any one.”

“In a few words,” returned Lord E. smiling, “you have given me the history of your heart, and you must forgive my petulant remark:—But pray, how came Eleanora to hear of this admired lady?”—
“Indeed I know not,” answered he, ingenuously, “unless in my delirium the name burst from my lips.” “It is very probable it might be so.—I will talk with Lord Somerset on the subject,”—seeing Lewis about to speak,—“fear not,” added he, “your secret shall with me be inviolable, if you wish it to be so.—I will bring about her base design against Hermine, simply as being a friend who had promised to
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serve you." Lewis was going to express his thanks, when Lord Somerset was announced;—he directly withdrew, tho' not without a perturbation in his looks that did not escape the notice of his Lordship.

"Now," thought Lewis, "I shall lose his promised interest.—When he hears that such a humble being as myself may be the medium to endanger the safety of his dear Lady Hermine, he will hate me as much as I detest myself.—But why not fly to London, and, if possible, trace that desperate diabolical wretch?" In a moment he wrote a few lines to Lord E. requesting his permission for the journey. The proposal met with their approbation, so far as to be allowed to accompany Lord Somerset, who, excessively alarmed, determined to return the following day; and this resolution was encouraged by Lord E. who being pronounced out of danger, would not detain them an hour unnecessarily.

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In the course of the day, Mr. Paulett was requested to enquire among the neighbouring cottagers, if any woman answering the description of Eleanora, was there, or had been there lately.—Her dress, Lewis observed, was very simple, and her face shrouded by a large straw bonnet;—but her large beautiful black eyes, and the expression of her countenance, no dress could disguise. Elworth-Hall was situated on the sea coast, about a mile and a half from the town of Pool.—A number of small cottages or fishermen's huts were sprinkled round, but no house of any consequence was nearer the hall than at Pool, tho' many handsome mansions were round the neighbourhood.

Mr. Paulett's report was, that a boat from Pool, had been observed by one of the fishermen to bring a sort of gentlewoman, three or four days following, and land her near the hall, but who she was, or where she

she came from, they could not tell, nor did she come always in the same boat.—The man who had particularly noticed her, thought that she might be a relation of one of the upper-servants, seeing she came to the hall, and therefore never troubled his head to make any enquiries. No doubt could be entertained but that this “sort of a gentlewoman” was Eleanora, and that she must have concealed herself among the thick bushes that were at the bottom of a low terrace walk towards the bay. It was therefore determined, a private but strict search should be set on foot in Pool and its environs, whilst Lord Somerset and Berthier proceeded to London.

The attempt on the life of Lord E. by an unknown person, in his own gardens, had made a great noise, and various were the conjectures it gave rise to;—the servants had at first promulgated a report that it was a Frenchman, who my Lord had taken

taken under his protection. In the course of two or three days, Mr. Paulett had rendered this report doubtful, and then a hundred other vague surmises were handed about, all equally unlikely;—and at length it was concluded to be an affair known only to Mr. Paulett.

The following morning Lord Somerset and Lewis hastily took their route towards London, though not without some reluctance on the part of Lewis, to leave Lord E. in his convalescent state; but urged by motives so imperious, and assured by Mr. Paulett, of his unremitting attention to the health and comfort of his patient, he took an affectionate leave of his Lordship, and attended Lord Somerset with an impatience, that, if possible, exceeded what his Lordship felt for the dearest object of his wishes. That the sudden return of Lord Somerset should not alarm his family, it had been previously settled.

settled they should alight at Lord E's. house, in Cavendish-Square; and after sending a note to Portland-Place, to apprize Lady Somerset of their arrival in town, they proposed to make all possible enquiries relative to Eleanora, through the medium of Hannah, who alone of Lord E's. domestics was intimate in her family. Leaving them for a short time to this investigation, we will look back upon our other friends, Lord Douglas and the interesting Fidelia, and her admired friend, the truly amiable Hermine.

Lord Douglas having seen the remains of his brother deposited in the family vault, returned to Rose Vale, to accompany his daughter to London, where business demanded his attendance. At one of the inns on the road, whilst the horses were changing, he had taken up a newspaper, and to his extreme surprise, read a paragraph stating "that Lord E. had been dangerously

ously wounded in his own grounds by an unknown assassin, as no person had been discovered in the gardens, and no one was with his Lordship but a *French gentleman of the name of Berthier*. At present the base attempt wore a very mysterious complexion, and it was feared his Lordship would not live to elucidate it, as he continued speechless and in great danger." This account had no doubt been sent to the papers immediately after the shocking accident was known, through the medium of the servants. Lord Douglas was almost petrified. — "Berthier with Lord E!—Berthier so abandoned as to be suspected of a base assassination!—Good Heavens!" thought he, "to what lengths, by a gradation of vice, to what a climax of wickedness, may a thoughtless youth arrive in a short period, when pursuing the impulse of unworthy passions!"—For Lord Douglas drew his conclusions from supposing Lewis had

had attacked Lord E. as his rival with Eleanora.

When he was set down at Rose Vale, after some conversation on family affairs, he reported to Fidelia the paragraph he had read in the paper. No words can delineate the effect this intelligence had on her feelings. Her emotions surprised her father; but before he could speak on the subject, she uttered two or three convulsive sighs, and dropped senseless from her chair. Extremely terrified, he rang for assistance, whilst he raised her in his arms; and after the usual remedies were applied, she opened her eyes, and regained her senses.—But when seated on the sofa she met the eyes of her astonished parent, she hastily averted her face, and in a few minutes burst into tears. “My dearest Fidelia,” said his Lordship, “I am greatly concerned that my abrupt communication had such an effect on your sensibility.—Indeed I was myself

myself so shocked that I ought to have been more guarded, knowing the tenderness of your disposition. But, my dear child, however we may *lament* the depravity of this youth, he certainly appears to be unworthy of our concern."

"If he has been guilty of an act so atrocious," she timidly replied, "if he is lost to all virtue and goodness, he is indeed unworthy; but to believe it seems to me almost impossible, from the general tenor of his character and conduct before he came to England." "That is, my dear," returned her father, "only saying, that he was good before he met with any temptation to be otherwise.—How easy to preserve a reputation when unassailed by the allurements of the world!—He might even in the forest have the germs of vice in his bosom, which lay dormant till opportunity called them into life and action."

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“If Lewis was vicious by nature, and when with my lamented brother a hypocrite by practice, then indeed he must be a lost young man.—Alas!” added she, with a sigh, “how will my dear Hermine lament and grieve for his defalcation from integrity and principle.” Again the tears streamed from her eyes, which she placed to the account of her friend, and begged to withdraw till more recovered.

“No,” said her father, “rest where you are, my love,—try to compose yourself,—I have business in the library for an hour or two, to look over papers with the steward.” He rose, and left her, not a little discomposed, for he saw too plainly, that almost unknown to herself, she had a strong partiality in favour of Lewis, that was dangerous to her peace; and when he reflected on the birth, and former occupation of the poor peasant, all his natural humanity and good nature was insufficient

to stifle a *hope*, that he might be found unworthy of her regards.—“ For if otherwise,” thought he, “ if the youth is deserving, and my Fidelia’s heart set upon him, parental tenderness, and the duty which I owe to my name and family, would have a painful conflict; and I cannot answer for the consequence either to her or to myself.”

Fidelia was little less shocked at the emotions she had betrayed, than at the baneful intelligence which had occasioned them.—Still her innocent heart saw only a friendly concern for an unfortunate youth, who had been ensnared into evil, by an artful—wicked woman. She could not—she would not believe him naturally depraved,—still less allow that her *heart* was any ways interested;—it was compassion,—it was humanity, and them only, that had so overpowered her feelings.

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But the eye of her father was painful to remember,—it seemed to dart a reproachful—inquisitive look into her bosom ;—and his words, though kind, were not warm and animated, as usual, when she was any way disordered.

Well, then, she must stifle her feelings, — the suspense was terrible, but she should soon see her dearly beloved Hermine, and then the truth of this dreadful story must be investigated. On the following morning, Lord Douglas and his Fidelia set off for London, and both, as if actuated by the same sentiment, avoided any mention of Lewis, or of the preceding conversation.

CH A P. XXXI.



WE shall now look in on Lady Somerset and her beautiful niece. We left Hermine trying to compose her spirits after such repeated trials of her sensibility.—The preamble, written by her father, had deeply affected her,—the express from Elworth-Hall, had equally shocked and vexed her. Lewis,—the once worthy Lewis, whom she had cherished as a dear friend, both from inclination and gratitude,—whose happiness was one of her first wishes,—whose name she never heard without emotion,—and who was the protegee of
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that good man, Father Francis,—was it possible that *he* could be so atrociously wicked? “Ah!” said she, “I fear he cannot be free;—nor shall I have the much wished for happiness of promoting his interest and felicity?” A violent paroxysm of tears gave some relief to the overwhelming anguish of her mind.

She then reverted to the transports of Lord Somerset on his mother’s encouraging hope, and his readiness to forego his own gratification to fly to the assistance of Lord E.—an estranged relation, who had no actual claims on his kindness.—“He has doubtless,” said she, “the best heart in the world,—unexceptionable in his person,—elegant in his manners,—and a mind superior to all I have ever known.—How then is it that I do not feel that warmth of affection that I have heard my young companions talk of, as essential to unite two hearts in one?” She ventured to ask

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herself, "Should I prefer Lewis to Lord Somerset, had he retained all his native virtues and integrity of heart, and with the power given to me by the fortune I am entitled to, to place him in a situation more worthy of his fancied merits?"

She took time for reflection—she gave Lewis every advantage, she did barely justice to her cousin—and after balancing the merits of each, independent of rank and fortune, she allowed that nature had been as bountiful to Lewis as to Lord Somerset; and had his opportunities for improvement been on an equality with the care taken of his Lordship, she had no doubt but that he would have proved as great an ornament to society. "But," said she, "the preponderance is indisputably in favour of Lord Somerset, and if my heart is not susceptible of such warm affections as many young women feel, at least both inclination and reason declare for his Lordship;

ship; and I am certain the sentiments I have ever felt in favour of Lewis, will not in the smallest degree interfere with the preference due to my cousin, whose virtues rise upon me every hour. Poor Lewis!" added she, with a sigh, "one would almost think I had *two hearts*, since I feel so deeply interested for you; but if you should be the unworthy youth that report and appearances bespeak you, I shall ever lament that you emerged from the forest, and were launched into a world of vice and folly, without stability or strength to resist its blandishments." After this investigation, Hermine seemed more at peace, for there were moments when she had feared to make the scrutiny into the nature of her feelings; and 'tis more than probable, that had she not known Lord Somerset, she might have unconsciously nourished a passion for Lewis, that would have gathered strength imperceptibly, and been inimical to her repose.

I am well aware that the lovers of romance, and very many of my young readers, will scarcely pardon me for this seeming change of sentiment in Hermine.—“Violent passion,”—“Love to distraction,”—“Unalterable constancy,”—and “Female perseverance,” are the high-sounding sentiments offered up to the shrine of obstinacy and folly. Female modesty, decorum, that soul subduing delicacy, which gives inexpressible charms to youth and beauty, are all sacrificed by a romantic girl, when she persuades herself to be *invariably attached*. There is stability of mind in resisting the tender admonitions of a parent—there is love and constancy, to plead against plain reason and good sense resulting from mature reflection. Love is the qualifier against every opposition; and whilst too often these Delias and Clarindas plunge a dagger in the heart of an affectionate parent, by flying to the altar with the man, whose selfish passion seeks to monopolize

monopolize their best affections, and draw them from their first duty,—they forget that they give to him but a sorry proof of virtue and integrity, when they can wound the maternal heart—when they violate every duty attached to the female character, and throw themselves into the arms of—a comparative stranger.

Hermine had certainly indulged a tender regard for Lewis, under the fallacy of gratitude; but she was not insensible of her duty to herself, nor unmindful that her future destiny was dependent on the commands of a father—and so sacred did she consider them, that nothing could tempt her to decide for herself; and thus, whilst she kept a due regulation over her rising propensities, they were always at the command of duty, and existing circumstances. Lord Somerset had such claims to preference, that Hermine had imperceptibly given him all her heart; and though misled by

romantic notions imbibed in the convent; she fancied herself a stranger to the passion described as so violent and tumultuous; and certainly inferior to the ardour of his Lordship's sentiments. Still she was convinced of a partiality for her cousin, even while she retained a warm regard for Lewis, and felt a painful anxiety to have his late conduct thoroughly investigated. "Strong as are the circumstances against him," said she, "I will hope, with my dear Fidelia, that he may be justified, until conviction shall compel me to think otherwise."

By judicious reflections, Hermine had obtained a command over her feelings, and in the evening requested her aunt would read the memoir of her father, that followed the preamble. As great part of this narrative has been already before our readers, we shall not impose upon them a twice told tale, but briefly relate a few such particulars as were unknown to Lady Somerset.

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The Count De Montaubert began his narrative with a confession of his juvenile excesses. An early attachment to a beautiful but unprincipled woman, gave the complexion to his future life, and stamp'd it with infamy, disgrace, and ruin. Gambling and intrigue led the way to the dissipation of his paternal estate; and by the advice of this woman, and a no less abandoned false friend, he was persuaded to look out for a woman of fortune, to gratify their avaricious demands. He could not be insensible to the charms of Mademoiselle De Melian, yet had hardly thought of her as a wife, from his mad passion for a worthless woman; had she not been pointed out as a joint heiress to an immense fortune, and in her own possession a very considerable sum independent of her father.

“I shall not *now*,” continued the Count, “incur the imputation of vanity, when I say, that at the time I addressed that much injured

injured lady, my person and acquirements were such as gave me but little cause to fear a rejection from youth and inexperience; but my character had reached the ears of her father, and from him I received a positive denial, conveyed in such terms, as conscience assured me I should never get over. My pride wounded, and my senses charmed by the beauty of the ill-starred Hermine, I determined to conquer. To this I was stimulated by the woman who still held me in her chains; and by a simulation of repentance, and a series of deceptive arts, I prevailed on the unsuspecting victim to give me her hand in defiance of parental authority. Love for his child soon produced a reconciliation. But I had not forgotten, or forgiven his rejection of me, and I determined to be revenged, though interest obliged me to wear the mask of respect and affection. The transient passion I had felt for my wife soon faded away, and I returned to my first attachment

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ment with more eagerness than ever. My dissipations were boundless, though rather more private, to deceive the Count; and by the infernal arts of two miscreants, I was soon brought to hate the innocent Countess, as a drag upon my pleasures and expences. At length I proceeded to such extremities, as to command her to renounce amusements of every kind—company of every description. I dared not to interdict her father's visits, from prudential motives; but I compelled her, by a solemn vow, to promise that her secession from the world should appear to be her own choice, and that she would never, directly or indirectly, complain of me to the Count, but appear to him happy and contented.

“ She complied with this cruel requisition without the smallest remonstrance; and when, in addition, I forbade her correspondence with the Somerset family, she mildly said,—“ A few lines now and then
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on general subjects is all I request; fear not that I shall ever develope your character, or my wretchedness—no, I am punished for my voluntary errors against their better judgment, and shall submit to what I have deserved, with patient endurance.” From that hour we lived in the same house as strangers to each other, except when I had company, and then the ill-treated angel appeared with a cheerful air, whilst her heart was lacerated by my cruelty and deception.”

The Count then mentioned her retiring to the old chateau,—her lying-in,—a series of ill-treatment by himself, and thro’ the means of his wicked associates. He proceeded to relate the death of her father, the Count De Melian,—his rage and disappointment, and consequent impertinence to Lord Somerset. “Having now,” he continued, “no longer measures to keep with my wife, and hating her more than ever

ever for the disappointment I was not prepared to expect, though I am convinced she was entirely innocent as to any influence over her father, in the disposition of his fortune, the wretches I was connected with, resolved that she should be the sufferer;—she was therefore confined entirely to the chateau and its environs. The villain, Soissons, was the medium between us and her only visitor;—he persuaded me she had affected a penchant for him,—that she sought to draw him into an intrigue, with a view, no doubt, of detaching him from me.

“ I was the credulous dupe of this improbable tale,—my blind confidence in him, and sense of my ill-treatment of her, led me to suppose, that patience exhausted, and a desire of revenge had driven her to extremities;—and in this belief I would have sent her to a convent for life, but he persuaded me that her present confinement
was

was more rigorous of the two. Besides, at present, I drew from her half the quarterly allowance left by her father, whereas, if provoked, and taken to a convent, she might retain the whole. Thus governed, I gave myself up to riot and dissipation, and left *her* to the machinations of a villain. From this lethargy I was awakened by the Chevalier's telling me of her flight from the chateau, with her child. We went to the Marquis De Bressol, accusing him as the contriver of her elopement. His surprise and solemn assurances convinced me he was innocent,—we then condemned the Somersets.—Mean time, emissaries were employed round the forest, to trace her flight, but without success; and it more than once occurred to me, that Soissons seemed uncommonly agitated, nay almost to distraction.—Once I remarked the violence of his emotions, but he had the art to place it to my account, as her flight would deprive me of
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that share of her allowance I had meanly drawn from her.

“ All our enquiries proved fruitless for near four years, in which time I had sold and mortgaged almost the whole of my property that was alienable. At the expiration of this period, one evening the Chevalier came to tell me he had discovered the Countess, who was in the Convent of St. Clare, in the province of Bretagne. He advised an immediate application to the king, to demand my child, and the sole management of her fortune; for as a subject of France, she ought not in her minority, to be entrusted to a vile and worthless mother, and a protestant guardian in a foreign kingdom.

“ In short we went secretly and securely to work.—The Chevalier obtained the interest of Madame De ——, whose influence was unbounded, and before the
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Marquis De Bressol knew a syllable of the transaction, I obtained an order for the delivery of my daughter to my agent, and the sole care of her property until she became one-and-twenty. This transaction was carried into effect by the Chevalier, and was the death-blow to the most injured of women.—Yes, by tearing her only comfort from her arms, I plunged a dagger in her heart,—I murdered my wife! Oh! gracious and merciful Being, look down upon my present feelings with an eye of compassion;—and thou, sainted Hermine, forgive the wretch who drags on a miserable life in anguish and never-ending remorse! My child, my Hermine, pray for mercy on your repentant father, that his punishment may not extend beyond this life,—for the most bitter suffering here, is self-condemnation.

“ When my child was brought before me, I felt emotions new and undescribable. She was beautiful as an angel, the perfect
resemblance

resemblance of her sainted mother;—my heart opened to receive her, and from that hour my tenderness towards her was unbounded. I placed her in a convent, and to her I appeal for the unwearied attention I paid to her happiness. Can it be believed that with all this affection for my child, I should still be the slave of a vile woman, the dupe of an artful man, by whose machinations I was drawn in to infringe upon the property of my child, and nearly to exhaust all that was entrusted to a false guardian and unnatural father? My whole life has been a life of deception, and my conduct a disgrace to human nature.

“ The will of Count De Melian had forbidden any one to acquaint Hermine with the fortune she was entitled to, until she was one-and-twenty,—and the oath I exacted from her mother had kept her in ignorance of any relatives whatever; this, with a bitter imprecation I had, in the moment

ment of disappointment, uttered against myself, if ever I permitted her to know, or be known to, the Somerset family, until she attained that age, has to this hour kept my child ignorant of her destiny, and given me the power to dissipate her fortune.—Base contemptible wretch as I am!—But let me hasten to conclude:—That most nefarious of villains, Soissons, was thrown from his horse, and supposed to be at the point of death;—his wicked deeds gave him inexpressible horrors,—he sent for a confessor and for me.—Great God! what were my feelings when he made, a brief confession of his crimes!

“The woman I had been so many years attached to, was *his mistress*!—they divided my fortune between them.—After my marriage, the Chevalier fell most violently in love with the Countess, and, in consequence prejudiced me against her, and obtained her confinement at the chateau, where

where he alone visited her, and sought by every possible artifice to obtain her favour. He could not enter into many particulars of *his persecution, and her invariable contempt.*—She could send no letters or messages;—his creatures had her always in sight.—After the death of her father she was solely in his power,—till then he had only used silent assiduities. At length, provoked at her resistance, and more than ever in love, he knelt, he swore that if she would return his passion, he would fly with her to England, and place her in the arms of her sister; or he would obtain an order from the King to confine me in the Bastile for life. These offers she rejected with a firm disdain, which so provoked him, that he snatched up her little Hermine, flew into the garden with her, and swore she should never see her more.—Distracted she followed and implored his mercy. A long and painful scene ensued, which drew from her two compulsive vows, as the only price for the preservation

preservation of her child;—which were, never to reveal any one circumstance that had passed between them, and henceforth to receive his visits, that he might have opportunities to conciliate her favour.

“The Countess then permitted me to lead her into the house,” continued the villain, “almost fainting with excess of terror.—She was obliged to be carried to her chamber, and after I quitted her I cursed my own folly, and resolved, on the following visit nothing should prevent the gratification of my passion; for I had wove a tissue of falshoods to bring her into my power, and, if unsuccessful, was a villain to no purpose. After this resolution judge of my distraction to find my intended victim had made her escape with her child, that very night I left her, taking with her her trinkets and what money she had by her.—’Tis *now*,” continued the wretch, “that I bless Heaven she escaped, tho’ I know, I feel

feel that I have been her murderer.—When I tore her child from her arms, I plunged the poniard to her heart,—and now all my crimes stand in dreadful array before me. Weak, credulous, but much deceived Count, I implore your pardon!—be warned by my fate,—see what will at last be the hours of remorse, the horrors of conscience!—Repent, and live to amend *your* life.—O! what would *I give for time* to supplicate the mercy of Heaven, to deprecate its just vengeance!” At these words he fell into strong convulsions, and I left him, in an agony of mind no language can describe.

“ I flew to the house of that abandoned woman,—I upbraided her in terms the most violent.—The unhappy wretch insulted, provoked, and ridiculed me as the contemptible dupe of two persons who always despised me.—My passions were wound up to madness, and I plunged my sword

sword into her bosom,—she fell without uttering a word. I ran home like a distracted being, secured my small property in money and a few trinkets, and hastened to the Convent for my beloved Hermine.—She knows the rest, and was a painful witness to the distraction of my mind.—May the agonies I endure, and remorse for my crimes, procure from Heaven a remission of my deserved punishment!

“ I have been on the verge of the last closing scene,—it has pleased the Almighty to restore me;—I write this dreadful narrative for the perusal of my child, I trust in presence of her aunt and Lord Somerset. My oath restricts me from placing confidence in Hermine, during my life, until she is one-and-twenty. If *I live* to see that period, I shall deliver to her this packet, and consign her to the care of those dear relatives, who will be parents to the orphan child of their lamented sister.

“ Should

“ Should I reach the Abbey of St. Hubert, it is my design to place Hermine in the Convent of St. Ursula, where I have a respectable relation.—If, as I sometimes fear, I may be called hence before my dearest child attains the age I have specified, then, in delivering this to her, I shall desire, that when I am laid in the cold grave, she may repair to England to her noble relatives and guardians, whose pardon I entreat not only for my crimes against their angel sister, but for my unjust and selfish prejudice against them. In full confidence in their honour and integrity, I leave the disposal and future happiness of my dearest and most beloved Hermine in their hands :—Alas! I have little to bequeath with her, yet after my death some property that is mortgaged may be recovered.

“ If the good old Marquis of Bressol
ould be alive at this period, in him my
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child will find a friend, should she want one, in France, who will interest himself to serve her. And now, my ever dear child, after this full confession of my crimes, against the most amiable of women, her beloved daughter, and noble relatives, and the injury I have done to society in general by a bad example, if a bitter repentance, if the most soul-harrowing remorse, can entitle me to pity and forgiveness, pray, oh, pray for the repose of my soul!—and that the mercy of Heaven may be extended to the self-condemned

“MONTAUBERT!”

Such were the brief contents of the packet. It does not appear that the Count ever received the letter written by the Countess on her death bed—no doubt it had been intercepted by the abandoned pair. The Chevalier, after meeting with his deserved fate, retired a miserable object into one of the severest orders in France.

Poor

Poor Hermine was overwhelmed with grief and horror; nor could Lady Somerset go through the narrative without many tears and frequent pauses. Lady Somerset endeavoured to soothe the sorrows of her niece with a consolatory hope, that a repentance so sincere would find mercy from Heaven; and that her father was more the instrument of wicked persons, than guilty from the impulses of his own heart.—“Let us draw a veil over past transactions,” said she, “and rely on the goodness and mercy of Heaven. My beloved Hermine is restored to her second mother, and may look forward to peace and happiness.” “My dearest aunt,” said she, “perfect felicity is not the lot of suffering humanity; and though I bow in humble gratitude to an all gracious being, for my present comforts, yet never will the afflictions of my sainted mother be erased from my memory, any more than the heart-felt sorrows of my poor father.”

The entrance of the good father La Casse, was a great relief to the ladies; and in this more composed state of mind, we shall leave them, and return to our peasant and Lord Somerset.

By Hannah, the house-maid, they were informed, that "the Italian Countess had left her house, her furniture had been privately sold, and all her English domesticks discharged. No one in the neighbourhood knew what was become of her, but it was generally supposed she was gone abroad." Lord Somerset sent a servant to her country retreat, where Lewis had been confined; the intelligence was similar to the preceding—in two days the family and effects had been suddenly removed, and no person knew where she had sought a retreat.—"Had this woman," said his Lordship, "succeeded in her design on you, every thing was in train for leaving the kingdom; and love, or revenge, were the determinate passions

passions that drove her to the most criminal excesses. I confess I shall not be at ease till we can learn if she has quitted the country." "At ease," repeated Lewis, "my Lord, I shall be miserable!—I tremble at the suggestions of my own disturbed fancy; I would sacrifice my life to be assured that she has left the kingdom.—Not for myself do I dread her vindictive malice, but, the Lady Hermine——" "Heaven preserve her!" cried Lord Somerset, starting from his chair,—“Let us instantly go to Portland-Place, they are now prepared. Oh! my Hermine! surely I may hope that Providence will watch over innocence like your's!—Come, Berthier, hasten, let us begone.”

For an instant Lewis stood immoveable —“*my Hermine,*” had reached his heart; but recovering from the painful throb, he was no less desirous than his Lordship to fly, and shield Hermine from all possible
M 3 danger—

danger—at the same moment that a contrary sentiment, a dread of encountering those charms he was sensible he ought to shun, seemed to repel his officious appearance. Lord Somerset, however, was too much absorbed in the tumult of his own fears, to notice the embarrassment of Lewis, and taking him by the arm, he almost dragged him from the house, proceeding hastily through the streets without uttering a syllable. This silence enabled his companion to commune with his heart, and to acquire resolution, from a conscious sense of inferiority of condition; and that the only sentiment that became him to indulge, was to rejoice in the happiness of the object he had always revered, and stifle for ever, his presumptuous passion, which from the first had been accompanied by despair, both from reason and reflection.

About an hour previous to their return, the affectionate Fidelia had flown to embrace

brace the friend of her heart, immediately after her arrival in town. Their transports on meeting were mutual and affecting.—Lady Somerset was extremely charmed with their young visitant; and after their first emotions were subsided, casually mentioned her expectation of seeing her son and Mr. Berthier every moment. “How!” exclaimed Fidelia, greatly agitated, “Mr. Berthier with Lord Somerset? — Good Heavens! surely then he cannot be the worthless character he is represented.” “I hope, nay, *I am sure*, if his Lordship has him as a companion,” answered Hermine, “much may be urged in his favour, and I am all impatience to see them.” “Perhaps,” said Fidelia, hesitating as she spake, “perhaps my visit is ill-timed, I will wait on——” “Forgive the interruption,” cried Hermine, taking her hand, “your presence is always most welcome, and indeed now necessary, for I know you are interested for Lewis nearly as much as myself.”

M 4

myself." Fidelity blushed unconsciously, while she replied, "Certainly I shall not be sorry to hear him exculpated from some of the heavy charges against him." "You are both amiable and candid," said Lady Somerset; "and as I have been accustomed to pride myself a little on *my* prepossessions, and skill in physiognomy, I do assure you, the acquittal of this young man is very near my heart, as I liked him from the first hour of his introduction to me." "I have never condemned *him*," said Fidelity, "though it was scarce possible to hope." "And I," added Hermine, "feared, because I esteemed him, and in some degree was instrumental to the change in his situation. But when I doubted, I was taught to be liberal in my conjectures by the generous Lord Somerset, —and *now* I am all hope and expectation."

A short conversation on the several past transactions in the family of Lord Douglas, beguiled

beguiled the time until Lord Somerset and Mr. Berthier were announced, which threw the whole party into considerable agitation;—nor were the others without their share of emotion. His Lordship, tho' his heart flew before him, to Hermine, had yet so much command over his feelings as to introduce the trembling Lewis, "I bring you, ladies," said he, bowing to his mother and Hermine, "an old acquaintance, every way deserving of your continued esteem and friendship. He has been carried off, by a most beautiful princess—has been delivered from her enchanted castle—narrowly escaped being put to death for his ungallant contempt of the lady;—and, after many perilous adventures and much danger, has the honour of being presented as the hero of a little romance."

His Lordship had thus ludicrously presented Lewis, to take off the pain of a formal introduction, and the novelty of it

recovered the ladies from their agitations, and caused a general smile. "You tell us so many things at once," said Lady Somerset, giving her hand to Lewis, who bowed on it most respectfully, "that whilst you greatly excite our curiosity, we find it impossible to have it immediately gratified: But I assure you, Mr. Berthier, that we are all extremely happy to see you." "Yes," said Herminie, drawing her hand from Lord Somerset, and giving it to Lewis, "yes, my good friend, you may estimate what we have suffered from your absence, by the very great pleasure we feel in seeing you restored to us;—and my amiable friend here, Miss Douglas, has not felt less on the occasion than I have.—She has always judged favourably, and with equal candour as my good cousin, who, I assure you, has been your champion in spite of appearances."

"This speech had a little re-assured Lewis, "I am so sensible, Madam, that my conduct

conduct has appeared ungrateful and contemptible in every point of view, that I could not dare hope for a liberal conjecture on actions that seemed as base as inexplicable;—but I would not wish to live an hour, if I could not exculpate myself from the imputation of ingratitude to those whom I so much honour and revere.”—“I dare believe you,” answered Lady Somerset, “at present we will wave all further particulars till evening, when, if your romance is not very terrific, you shall be condemned to be the hero of your own tale,—and without reserve or abbreviations, remember.”

Lewis bowed,—he was placed next to Fidelia, and whilst Hermine introduced her to Lord Somerset, he could not but observe how very lovely she was—how very much she resembled his poor friend Frederic.—His heart already softened by the reception he had met with, tears sprang to his

his eyes on recalling Mr. Douglas to his view, and Fidelia at that moment turning her looks on him, beheld the melancholy tenderness that had overspread his features, and the hasty brush off from the overcharged eye. Her's instantly caught the soft contagion, and observing he threw his looks down on her sable dress, "Ah! Mr. Berthier," said she, in a trembling voice, "my dear brother—my poor Frederic, was made truly unhappy in being deprived of your attentions, but he could not think so very ill of you, neither, as to believe all that we were told; and, on his death bed, he charged us with his best wishes to you, and thanks for your former kindness." The tears gushed from her eyes, Lewis rose, unable to speak, and withdrew to the window, whilst Hermine and Lord Somerset sought to compose Fidelia.

When Lewis had acquired a small degree of resolution, he approached the amiable

able friends,—he looked with tender anxiety on Fidelia—he turned his eyes on Hermine by the side of Lord Somerset, the joy—the transport that animated *his* countenance, declared at once the feelings of his heart, and caused an uneasy sensation in the breast of Lewis,—if there was less of happiness in the looks of Hermine, yet there was an eye-beam of pleasure when she spake to her lover, that convinced the *interested observer*, she was not indifferent to the transports her presence occasioned. “Yes,” thought he, “they are by Heaven designed for each other;—birth, fortune, persons, and accomplishments, have united them in one sentiment, and I feel that it is my duty to rejoice in their happiness.” He withdrew his eyes from a dangerous object to the amiable and interesting Fidelia, whose charms could scarcely, be equalled, and only exceeded by her superior friend. In the present state of his heart, the tender dejected air diffused over the
countenance

countenance of Miss Douglas, was extremely touching, and he found himself irresistibly attracted to pay her the most respectful attentions.

Lord Somerset, supremely happy in the presence of Hermine, and in having restored to her a young man she esteemed,—and whose character he was equally pleased with, had only one drawback upon his perfect felicity,—the recollection of Eleonora's denounced vengeance.—Could he but learn she had left the country, he had not a wish ungratified, but to receive the hand of his charming cousin.

Fidelia felt agitations undescribable.—From her first knowledge of Lewis she had been prepared to esteem him as an extraordinary young man, and this esteem received considerable encrease by his acknowledged attentions to her brother.—His sudden disappearance, with subsequent events,

events, had given some check to a decided partiality,—yet she found it difficult to condemn him, even when circumstances were most unfavourable; and it was with joy and exultation that she heard from her friend of his expected arrival, and consequent acquittal of those heavy crimes laid to his charge. She was shocked at her own emotions when he was introduced by Lord Somerset, and glad of a few moments to recover, whilst he approached the ladies. When Hermine referred him to her, and he addressed her with that touching, respectful air which reaches to the heart, she was confused and agitated, and in the recollection of her brother sought to deceive herself as to the nature of her feelings. They continued to converse for some time, mutually pleased and interested,—for Lewis was charmed with her candid judgment on his conduct, without knowing the extent of it;—not being sensible that he had been
accused

accused publicly as the assassin who had wounded Lord E.

Miss Douglas at length rose to leave them, "No," said Lady Somerset, "I have taken the liberty to secure you to your friend, by sending a servant to request the honour of seeing Lord Douglas without ceremony, as I hope we are to be upon the unreserved footing of friends, from this most agreeable visit." Fidelia politely thanked her Ladyship, and with no small pleasure resumed her seat.

"I am very desirous of paying my respects to Lord Douglas," said Lewis.—A thundering rap at the door stopped him,—
"I hope," rejoined Lord Somerset, "this is his Lordship." The door was opened, a servant appeared to announce the visitor, but before he could speak, a lady rudely pushed by him, and they beheld Eleanor! The same sentiment of terror took possession

session of Lord Somerset and Lewis, who had exclaimed, "Eleanora!" both flew to stand before Hermine, whilst the former cried out, "Seize her!—Seize her this moment!" and the servant, still at the door, hastily advancing, she drew a pistol from her pocket, "Touch me at your peril, fellow!" he drew back. Lord Somerset sprang forward, as she turned to the man, and seized her arm.—Fidelia shrieked and fainted;—Lady Somerset and the astonished Hermine screamed for assistance,—the latter would have flown to her friend, "No, no," said Lewis, in an agony, "O! for Heaven's sake keep behind me,—let *me* receive the ball!" Two or three servants had now rushed in, and whilst one went to Fidelia the others assisted Lord Somerset to disarm the struggling Eleanora, whose strength was almost supernatural, from the violence of her passion. The pistol was taken from her, and whilst the men held her, uttering the most horrid imprecations and curses,

Lord

Lord Somerset said, "Shameless woman, a disgrace to your sex, I wave all delicacy with such a wretch!" and searching her pockets, drew another pistol from one of them. "Your diabolical purpose is now, thank Heaven, completely defeated!" and ringing the bell for another servant, he gave him the pistols to discharge in the yard.

The whole of this scene was so suddenly transacted that Lady Somerset and Hermine were fixed in astonishment and terror; whilst Lewis endured agonies beyond description in his fears for the invaluable life of Hermine—and almost equally concerned for the fainting Fidelia. When he saw Eleanora was secured, he ventured to quit his station, and the person of Hermine stood fully exposed to the violent Italian. "Ah!" shrieked she, in a frightful tone, "I see, I see, that is the enchantress, that is the hated Hermine, who possesses the heart of Lewis.—Oh! that I could blast her

her with a look!—that my eyes had the power of a basilisk, to annihilate her,—to immolate her a sacrifice to glut my vengeance!” “Drag her into another room,” said Lord Somerset. “You shall not,” cried she, struggling, “until I have cursed the charms of that Circe who has made me a wretch!—she, she, whom that idiot Berthier preferred to me—whose name he uttered in an hour of madness as the adored of his soul!—To kill her, and then myself, was my purpose here.”

“Wretch!” exclaimed Lord Somerset, “you condemn yourself.” “And who are you?” asked she, stamping with fury, “that dare arraign my conduct—let your laws condemn me. I value not life, it is hateful to me since I have known what it is to love a senseless monster—had I taken her’s I should die with transport. What stupid wretches were my emissaries, not to inform me who were here to guard her—

her—O, I expected to find her alone, to exult over her, and triumph over Lewis;—but now, may all the curses——” “Drag her away,” cried Lewis; and the men obeyed, whilst her imprecations floated on their ears.

Lord Somerset followed to order she should be secured and guarded; then instantly returned to his company, who were all struck dumb with amazement, terror, and confusion. Nor was his Lordship less agitated, the design against the life of Hermine overwhelmed him with horror;—but that this intended blow was in consequence of *jealous rage*—that Lewis should have expressed a passion for *that lady*, was a circumstance equally painful and surprising.

As to Lewis no words can describe *his feelings*,—that secret which he had scarcely acknowledged to himself,—a presumption that he judged must entirely throw him from the
the

the esteem of Hermine, Lord Somerset, and Fidelia,—this secret now dragged forth as the cause in which the life of Hermine was implicated with the horrid expressions uttered *against her*, whom he would die to preserve from every ill,—no, no language can pourtray the agitations that *overpowered him*.—In his confusion he had sought to hide his countenance, by assisting the terrified Fidelia, but the same sentiment drew Lady Somerset and Hermine towards her, for both were equally shocked. Neither had spoken when his Lordship returned, but Fidelia was recovering;—she looked on each of her friends.—“Is she gone? Are you safe? Oh! Berthier, are *you* safe—unhurt,—are you *indeed*?”

Inexpressibly confused, he replied, “No one is hurt, Madam, thank Heaven all is safe;—here are your friends.” She turned her head and beheld Hermine bending over her, and Lady Somerset by her side. Her
recollection

recollection seemed to return;—"I have been terribly frightened,—my head and my senses are all confused.—Is that shocking woman gone?" "Yes, my dear Fidelia," answered Hermine, "she is taken care of in another room."

"Oh! take her from the house," said she, "the sight of her brought terror to my heart,—she is a murderess,—she destroyed my poor Frederic." "Compose yourself, Madam," returned Lord Somerset, "you have nothing to fear,—she is properly secured." At that moment Lord Douglas was announced, and before Lord Somerset could advance to meet him, he perceived Fidelia on the sofa surrounded by her friends. Forgetful of ceremony, he flew to her, and met the eyes of Lewis, who was standing on the opposite side, at a loss whether he ought to retreat or not. Fidelia raised herself, spake, and gave her hand to her father. "Be not alarmed, dear Sir,
'tis

'tis only fright,—that horrid Italian, Eleanora!" "How," cried he, darting a look of suspicion on Lewis, "Eleanora! and is it Mr. Berthier I see here?"

"Yes, Sir," replied Lewis, bowing respectfully, but recovering the firm dignity of innocence, hurt by his question and reproaching looks, "yes, Sir, I had the honour of accompanying Lord Somerset from Elworth-Hall, and should before this have paid my respects to you; had I not learnt that Lady Somerset expected your Lordship here." "This is all very strange to me," returned Lord Douglas, still with a reserve in his manner, "but you may believe, Mr. Berthier, that I am very glad to meet you in this company."—Then turning to Fidelia,—“What of Eleanora, my dear, how came you alarmed by her?”

"You shall presently know the whole business," said Lord Somerset, "Miss Douglas

Douglas is now better, and we must take you to council on future proceedings. At present let me present you to my mother, Lady Somerset, and her niece, whom you have known under the name of Hermine."

"Known with equal gratitude and admiration," said his Lordship, after he had made his bow to Lady Somerset, and advanced to her beautiful niece, "it would be impossible to see this lady but once, and not to carry away the impression;—but I have obligations on the part of my Fidelia, that have stamp'd her image firmly on my heart and memory."

Hermine was not insensible to the pleasure conveyed by such delicate praise, as modesty itself might accept without a blush, and made a suitable return to it. "You will allow me also as my guest, to introduce Mr. Berthier, who is happily and *honourably* returned to his friends, thro' the kindness of Lord E."

"I

“ I am extremely happy to hear it,” returned Lord Douglas, with a reserve in his manner not unnoticed by Lewis, “ our acquaintance, Mr. Berthier, was very unhappily broken off, and the consequences were most fatal to my peace; but no doubt you can *honourably* account for it.” “ I can, Sir, and I will, or I should not presume on the generosity of my Lord Somerset to stand this trial. My sudden disappearance, and subsequent events were most deeply felt and deplored by me from that hour to the present one.”

Lord Douglas was about to speak with rather a more gracious air, when a violent noise, and loud call for help alarmed the whole company;—a servant suddenly appeared, in great agitation,—“ My Lord,” cried he, “ the lady has stabbed herself!” The gentlemen all rushed from the room, —the ladies, overcome with terror, crowded together on the sofa, where they remained

some minutes unable to speak.—As for Lady Somerset and Hermine, astonishment was added to terror, for they knew nothing of Eleanora, even by name, but began to surmise she must be the Italian lady Miss Snarler had mentioned.

Lord Somerset now stepped in, and seeing the general alarm, said, kissing the hand of his charming cousin, “Compose yourself, my dear Hermine, dear ladies, recover your spirits, this wretched woman is not, I believe, dangerously hurt, for she raves at her own want of skill to give the final blow.—A surgeon is sent for, and when his report is made, I hope we may have her conveyed from hence.” Lord Douglas came in, a good deal agitated, upon which, Lord Somerset requested he would stay with the ladies, and immediately withdrew.

Fidelia, a little recovered by the presence of her father, observed, what a horrid creature

ture Eleanora was, adding, "I hope it is no breach of charity, when I say, that if the divine mercy could be extended towards her, I should not be sorry to hear she was for ever cut off from doing more mischief."

"I wish *I had not* seen her," answered his Lordship, "she has tortured my heart by the most cruel remembrance of past events; and yet, such is the fascination she throws over our senses, 'tis impossible to see, and to hate her, vile as she is." "But where is Berthier? my dear Sir, has she no longer the power to hurt him?—what does *he think of her?*" "Indeed I know not *his thoughts*," answered Lord Douglas, looking steadily in her face, which covered it with blushes, "there seems a good deal of mystery between them, which he only can elucidate." "And will, I doubt not, to his honour," joined in Hermine. "I hope so," said Lady Somerset. "I am *sure* it will be so," added Hermine, "or Lord Somerset would not have introduced him

here;—for tho' his generosity and candour might induce him to pity and assist an erring fellow creature, neither his honour nor justice would have permitted him to appear before us, was he not perfectly exculpated from guilt, in the opinion of his Lordship." "You are eloquent in favour of Berthier," remarked her Ladyship, coldly. "Yes, my dear aunt, for I rely on the unquestioned *honour*, as well as *goodness* of your son, and dare rest my faith on his judgment."

If there appeared a warmth in Hermine to justify Lewis, there was an undisguised friendliness that sought no cover to conceal any latent feelings. Indeed, the expressions of Eleanora had confused and agitated her for a moment, and the revenge she threatened had terrified her,—but Hermine had more strength of mind than to sink under the fright, when she saw her secured from doing mischief; and having soon recovered
from

from the confusion occasioned by such a disclosure of Lewis's attachment, she placed it in part to his respectful friendship, and also to the aggravated fears of a jealous woman. In fine, she sanctioned *his feelings* and *her own*, under the names of gratitude and friendly regard, which might be openly avowed without dread of any evil construction from persons of honour. And it is certain this candid and generous warmth tended to exterminate some unpleasant suspicions that had been engendering in the bosom of Lady Somerset, and given her no small pain.

As to Lord Douglas, he was far from feeling any pleasure in the defence of Lewis, for he had watched the eyes and countenance of his daughter, till both his affection and pride were hurt by the scrutiny; and he would rather have heard of his attachment to the Italian, or even that he was reprobated by the present family, than

to have had the partiality, he saw but too plain, confirmed in its strength by the justification of this humble young man—a forest peasant, taken from a laborious employment to figure among persons so much above him. He would most readily have given his interest or money to provide handsomely for Lewis,—but to give him his daughter, was not for a moment to be thought of with patience; and the very idea gave birth to a repelling coldness of manner he could not hide from the penetrating eyes of the unoffending peasant. Whilst these sentiments and complexed emotions were passing in the bosoms of those in the drawing room,—in the adjoining one was a different scene.

When Eleanora was taken from the company, and held by the servants, after the first paroxysm of violent execrations was over, her usual cunning recurred to elude the vigilance of her guard. She
heard

heard the name of Lord Douglas announced, "Now then," thought she, "I shall be blasted by the sight of all these wretches, who will delight in my mortification and enjoy my agonies.—Death, death is a thousand times preferable to being gazed at by them, as a monster, and to endure the proud triumph of that enchantress who has stolen from me the only man I ever loved—I ever can love! I shall hear their contemptuous upbraidings,—my fruitless attempt at revenge will subject me to their laws.—Is all this to be borne?—O! no!—My vengeance defeated—my hopes blasted, I will not live to bear their scorn!"

Whilst this mental soliloquy passed, the men believed her to be more composed; and one of them wanting his handkerchief, grasped her firmly with one hand, as he put the other in his pocket. What important events often hang on the slightest circumstance—that instant with a sudden

jerk she disengaged her arm, snatched a poniard from her bosom, and aimed a blow at her heart. The struggle and the wound were the work of a moment, for her hand was seized as she plunged the weapon into her side, and prevented the instant death she had premeditated. Furious with her disappointment her violence caused a prodigious effusion of blood, and she sank on the floor, whilst the men loudly called for help. What was the general alarm we have already seen. When the gentlemen rushed into the apartment they were exceedingly shocked, particularly Lewis, who thought her dead. But their endeavours to stop the blood, with the assistance of the housekeeper, restored her to life; and her first words were curses on her unsteady hand, and on the officious wretch who had intercepted the blow from proving fatal. She had not strength however to express all the rage that she felt; but seeing Lewis busy in assisting her,—“ You, you,” cried she,

she, “stand off, ’tis you are my murderer, —my blood be on your head!” He was shocked, but humanity impelled him to be active in his services—and she was too weak to articulate more.

The surgeon at length came, and on inspection found it a mere flesh wound, and not the least dangerous; but from the great effusion of blood, she would require much care and attention, he said. “Can she be removed with safety?” asked Lord Somerset. “I think she may, at a short distance.” He demanded of her, where she resided?—She either could not, or would not answer. On enquiry, no servant waited, nor any carriage near the house. The porter said, when he opened the door, she pushed by him,—“I am going to the Lady Hermine;” and before he could speak she had ran hastily up the staircase which fronted the hall, and he had not re-

covered his surprise before he heard the alarm in the drawing room.

“What is to be done?” asked his Lordship, “I fear we must order an apartment in the house, to be made ready for her.” “There is no time to be lost,” rejoined the surgeon, “whatever is done should be done directly.” “Well then, little as she deserves consideration, humanity will not permit us to hazard her life; let her be taken to a decent chamber, as distant from the ladies as possible, and on no account to be left alone for one moment.”

Lord Somerset then withdrew, and Lewis, who had not spoken one word, would have followed, but she had seized his hand as he assisted to place her on a sofa, and held it so firmly grasped, that without violence he could not disengage himself. He made an effort, but she uttered a faint shriek, and fixed her eyes on him

him with such an expression as his feelings were not proof against; and both the surgeon and himself assisted to convey her to the chamber prepared for her. The motion caused her to faint—Lewis had his hand free, and leaving her to the surgeon and the female attendants he hastened away, but not immediately to the drawing room, for he wanted to take counsel with himself.

Lord Douglas had looked more than coldly, there was a haughty reserve in his manner that seemed repulsive and disdainful; appearances had made against him, he was free to acknowledge, but the introduction of Lord Somerset, he thought entitled him to some little confidence. If he was hurt by this, how much more so was he on considering the late scene in which Eleanora had disclosed his attachment to *the Lady Hermine*, and avowedly devoted that invaluable life a sacrifice to her

her jealousy and revenge. Lord E. had suffered most severely for his kindness to him, though accidentally; and now the adored object of his reverence and eternal admiration, had miraculously escaped death, for having extended her friendship and protection to him. No life was safe whilst this horrid Italian lived, and was at liberty; and he, humble by birth, an outcast from fortune, dependent and wretched, he was made the instrument to wound and destroy those noble persons, to whose humanity he was solely indebted for the means of existence. Distracting thought!—Nor less painful was the idea of lifting his eyes to the face of Hermine—her life endangered, eventually through him, whose presumption she must despise, and whose person she must hate, as the cause of all this disturbance and future apprehension.

Lewis was standing leaning against a pillar in the library, the door of which he
had

had found open, when Lord Somerset entered.—“ I have been seeking you, Mr. Berthier, come, come, recover yourself; this addition to your romance has made every one eager for an elucidation of the past scene. Thank Heaven, the wicked intention of that infernal woman was happily prevented.—I shudder still in the idea of what might have been the consequence had not Providence interposed by our timely arrival.” “ My Lord,” answered Lewis, “ what I feel, no words can describe, any more than my sensibility of your goodness—for you ought to hate me.”

“ Hate you, prythee, Berthier, do you believe that you are accountable for involuntary sentiments, for words uttered in the paroxysm of madness—or for the rage of a jealous woman?” “ But the dreadful consequences that might have been, in which I was implicated as the cause.”

“ At present,” returned Lord Somerset,
“ you

“you have many friends prepared to hear you with candour and partiality; we implicitly rely on your truth and integrity—come and justify us.” “O, my Lord,” cried Lewis, “you already know every circumstance but one—a presumption that never escaped my lips, no, not even the name, but when unhappily deprived of my reason.” “Say no more on that head, you have nothing to accuse yourself for.—I wish you to relate your own story;—I am perfectly satisfied that you are a worthy, good young man, whom I shall be pleased to call my friend, and happy in being allowed the privilege of providing for.—But come, we lose time.”

Lewis, overpowered with the most lively emotions of gratitude, had no words to express his feelings; and followed Lord Somerset in silence to that tribunal who were to sit in judgment on his conduct. After a few mutual congratulations on their eventful

eventful escape, Berthier took his seat, and prepared to begin his narrative from the evening when he was entrapped from the house of Mr. Douglas. He would have passed over very slightly the scenes between him and Eleanora, but Lord Somerset, with a view to amuse the ladies, insisted upon every particular,—“I have given you out as the hero of a romance, and I pray let us have a relation of your temptations and persecutions, discourteous and ungrateful knight as you were, to reject the lady of the castle.” Lewis attempted to smile, but his feelings were not in unison; and with all the conciseness, and modesty of his nature, he proceeded on to the arrival of Lord Somerset at Elworth-Hall.

All his auditors were interested and delighted with the explanation of his conduct, except Lord Douglas. He could not deny him his approbation, but he wished his claims to esteem had been less, because he
dreaded

dreaded the partiality of Fidelia, whose emotions were but too visible to an inquisitive eye. Hermine felt the purest joy at his exculpation, from the heavy charges that had hung over him. Her *regard* was undiminished, though her tenderness was insensibly drawn towards another object, and an earnest desire to promote the interest and happiness of Lewis, was among her dearest wishes. When his narrative was concluded, they all joined in *congratulation* and *approbation*. Fidelia said little, but she felt a great deal; and as Lewis now, and then cast his eyes towards her, the soft confusion of her looks, and the recollection of the interest she had expressed for his preservation from Eleanora, altogether raised similar emotions in his own bosom;—and it may be said, that *his* seemed to be a divided heart, without the least hope, or even wish of any return from either. “What now could be done with Eleanora?” was the general question. She was of a disposition too dangerous

dangerous to be left at her own discretion ; —a mind so depraved, would be more violently stimulated to revenge by her recent disappointment, and from such a woman every thing horrid was to be dreaded.

“ I think,” said Lady Somerset, “ we must keep her well guarded for a few days, till she is better, or until she declares her residence, and where her domestics are.—In the mean time privately to take counsel’s opinion.” “ O, as to the latter, ’tis unnecessary,” said Lord Douglas, “ her attempt and avowed intention is sufficient to convict her;—but to make her a public example, will be to draw on an exposition of so many unpleasant occurrences, in which all our names will be implicated for the conjectures of busy-bodies and malevolent people, that I confess I shrink from giving her up to justice.” “ So do we all, I believe,” returned Lord Somerset, “ nor had the idea entered my head,—I would rather have her
confined

confined as a lunatic." "We must reflect before we determine," said Lady Somerset, "and perhaps may yet be governed by her, if we can bring her to give an account of her residence and servants."

Hermine was going to add something, when a servant entered to say the lady was in convulsions. Lord and Lady Somerset immediately went to her apartment, and were informed that violent spasms had seized her soon after she had been left, but she declined all assistance, until at length she fell into fits. The surgeon very opportunely that moment came in, and his Lordship withdrew. It was long before she recovered from the convulsions, and when restored to sense, the spasms still continued with much violence, and gave the surgeon very serious apprehensions. A physician was sent for, and a strong dose of laudanum, with outward applications, after some time procured temporary ease. She
was

was reduced excessively low,—she looked some time at each person,—at length,—“ I think,” said she, “ death is at hand,—I have mocked him but too often, and now I feel him at my heart.”

She was requested by Lady Somerset, not to speak, and assured that every care should be taken to relieve her. Again she looked earnestly on her Ladyship, then shut her eyes, saying, “ Death is welcome!—Oh, Berthier!” She continued quiet, and appeared to dose, Lady Somerset left her, and returned to inform her friends that the doctors had small hopes of her life,—should the spasms and convulsions return; from the effusion of blood so lately they judged it impossible that she could struggle through them. Every one was anxious and interested in the event, Lewis particularly, as he seemed to be the cause of all those alarming consequences, from her attachment to him.

Lord

Lord Douglas and his daughter took leave;—the former with more respect than kindness, assured Lewis of his regard and wish to serve him. The amiable Fidelia looked more than she dared to say, but expressed her esteem in a low tone of voice, that penetrated to the heart of Lewis, and made him extremely uncomfortable.

Lady Somerset, tho' liberal and benevolent, had abated something of her regard for Lewis, when she heard of his presumption.—To entertain a passion for Hermine lessened her opinion of his good sense and unassuming virtues;—she seemed to forget that our affections are involuntary, and his, surely could not degrade the object, or • deserve reprehension, since it had been confined to his own bosom, and a name uttered under a fit of insanity could offend none but a jealous woman. Her Ladyship, indeed, on reflection, saw nothing in Hermine's words or actions that could import
more

more than a friendly regard, which was openly avowed;—yet, still she wished Lewis to be handsomely settled at some distance from them, until after the marriage of her son, at least.

Lord Somerset trembled for the life of Hermine, should the Italian recover;—he was too generous to condemn Lewis for an involuntary admiration he thought extremely natural for any man to feel, who had the happiness of being in her society. He was surprised at the first discovery, but the confusion of Lewis, and the unaffected candour of Hermine, afforded not the least ground for degrading his charming cousin, by a suspicion unworthy of her.—All his anxiety arose from terror, in the vindictive designs of a vile and unprincipled woman.

Hermine was not free from inquietude; she was greatly confused as well as terrified by the threats and conduct of Eleanora.—

She

She felt pleased and grateful for Lewis's attachment to her, but which she supposed to be greatly exaggerated by jealousy,—for she had observed much more of tenderness in his looks towards Fidelia, than ever she had noticed when addressed to herself. Under this impression, she thought little of his passion, any otherwise than in the imagination of the Italian;—but with that *mistaken idea (as she thought it)*, she had every thing to dread from her violence, of course she could not *feel* quite so composed as she strove to appear, that she might not alarm Lord and Lady Somerset.

As to Fidelia, she had now made a discovery, very painful in the conviction;—she was no longer blind to the tender partiality she had long cherished for Lewis, under all the unfavourable appearances that seemed to shake her confidence in his worth and honour. The transport she could neither repress nor disguise when his
conduct

conduct was elucidated so greatly to his credit, with the horror that had deprived her of life, when she thought *his* to be in danger—altogether betrayed the secret of her heart. She recalled, with delight, the tenderness of his eyes,—the softness of his voice when he addressed her; and being assured of the affection that was undisguised between Lord Somerset and her charming friend, she too was ready to place the revengeful jealousy of Eleanora to ill-founded suspicions, grounded on an accidental exclamation, in a moment of delirium.

Under these impressions, Fidelia indulged the pleasing chimera of being the preferable object of his regard,—but she was not blind to the difficulties in which this mutual passion might involve them. She could discover the sentiments of her father, his coldness to Lewis, and reserve to her.—Her father was now a Lord—true, but he had a son to inherit his title and fortune,
who,

who, tho' at school, was in good health, and stood a chance to escape all the follies of poor Frederic, from being under very excellent preceptors. Then, again, she was but a natural daughter, there was an implied disgrace affixed on *her birth*, tho' her mother was afterwards married. She had, in fact, no right to the name of Douglas, nor were she to marry, dared she to assume it at the altar,—where then was her mighty superiority over Lewis?—She was, assuredly her own mistress in the disposal of her fortune;—her uncle, Lord Douglas, had been so pleased with her, that by his will he left her his estate of Rose Vale, about six hundred a year, and ten thousand pounds in the funds, entirely in her own power.

“ I have more than enough,” thought Fideliã, “ to make me happy with a worthy man,—grandeur, pomp, and titles, are, to me, tiresome and oppressive;—brought
up

up in retirement, a select society of friends, and domestic happiness, have a thousand times more charms for me, than noisy crouds, and places of public exhibition. I would wish certainly to obtain my father's approbation; nor will I marry against his decided prohibition; but I trust his affection and justice will not be unconvinced when he impartially considers my situation and future happiness." Thus in delightful castles of her own building, Fidelia passed a sleepless night, whilst Lord Douglas felt the most tormenting anxiety on the same subject. He was mild, good-natured, and generous;—he did justice to the merit of the peasant,—he allowed that he was gentlemanly in his person and manners, and had many estimable qualities.—But a peasant, a wood-cutter, without fortune or pretensions—to give *his* daughter to such a man, it was impossible to be thought of.—He must break the acquaintance, and take Fidelia from town;—he would go abroad with her.

Absence, and different objects would soon erase the slight impression, and give her a juster opinion of her own consequence. Yet, though determined against Lewis as a son-in-law, he was generous enough to concur in promoting his interest, and ready to join in a handsome sum to procure his establishment in some public office, or any line that met his wishes; and for this purpose he would see Lord Somerset the following morning.

Whilst all those persons were deprived of rest, by their different meditations and plans, we shall not venture to give a full description of the feelings that agitated the bosom of Lewis. If he could not, without some painful struggles, reconcile his mind to seeing his long adored Hermine in the arms of Lord Somerset, yet, hopeless as his passion had ever been, and her happiness the principal object of his wishes, where had she a fairer chance of enjoying it, than
with

with his Lordship, whose claims to her favour, were in every point of view indisputable. There was nothing to oppose against this conclusion. Then the sweet, interesting Fidelia rose to his view. Experience had taught him to translate the language of the eyes, and in her's he had read a tender tale, which was impressed on his heart;—but how dared he, poor wretch as he was, thus to slide from one error to another? Was not Fidelia, too, a Lord's daughter, and himself a being cast on the world—dependant on generosity for his daily bread and future existence?

“ Surely,” exclaimed Lewis, “ I am a most presumptuous, base, and unworthy mortal, but from this hour I will overcome my unpardonable boldness, or fly from them for ever.”

C H A P. XXXII.



THE following morning saw all the inmates in Lady Somerset's house assembled at an early hour in her dressing room. Lord Somerset had entered about five minutes before Hermine joined him.—The rapturous speeches of an ardent lover 'tis not necessary to repeat—Hermine, though not displeased, checked the effusion of tenderness by asking after Eleanora. “She is dreadfully ill,” returned he, “and has requested to see my mother when she comes from her room, though she would not

not suffer her to be disturbed. I have seen the surgeon, he is apprehensive the wound will mortify from the state of the blood, inflamed by violence, and the terrible spasms that have distracted her all night. He added, that her spirits seemed greatly subdued, and much more composed, but he was apprehensive it was the forerunner of that torpor which generally preceded a mortification."

Lady Somerset now made her appearance, and being informed of Eleanora's desire to see her, she hastened to her chamber, and was surprised at the amazing change in her person and disposition. After the first enquiry of her health, Eleanora thus addressed her,—“I must entreat your pardon, Madam, for the disturbance I have occasioned in your family:—I feel that death is laying his cold hand on my heart, his approach is welcome—to live without Berthier would be torment.

Insensible, obdurate wretch!" exclaimed she, with all the energy of which she was capable.—Then sinking and gasping for breath,—“I forgive him, for I have found that love is involuntary. I would have pursued him to the last moment of my existence, for never, never could I live to see him devoted to another.—That horrid apprehension has influenced all my actions, his death would have given ease to my heart, though I could not have survived him;—but 'tis now all over, he may triumph, and I am the victim of an unrestrained, violent passion for a mean ingrate.”

As she paused from weakness, Lady Somerset enquired her residence, and if she chose to have her servants sent for. “'Tis on this business, Madam,” said she, “I wished to see you.” An obscure lodging in Paddington-Street, she named; adding, she had only two servants there, a man and a woman, the former an Italian. “My cabinet;”

cabinet," continued she, "containing my jewels and securities for monies, with a chest of plate, and other valuables, are at Child's, a banker, at Temple-Bar. — My will is in the cabinet, in which I long since gave my property to the ungrateful Berthier. I had proposed to make a new will—but now I confirm the one already made. I conjure you, Madam, instantly to reclaim my property from the banker's,—I will try to write the order."

Whilst she was speaking the physician came in.—"Speak, Sir," said she, "do not trifle with me, I do not wish for life—tell me, is not my existence nearly at a period?—how soon may I expect a release?" The physician, after a little hesitation, confessed there were small hopes of her recovery, and if the symptoms continued so unfavourable, perhaps—two, or three days might decide her destiny; though he presumed not to say, it was *impossible* that

she should recover. "I am satisfied," said she, very calmly. She ordered pen and ink, but the effort was made to write without effect.—"Yes," said she, after a little pause, "I see it is all over.—I wish for a confessor, for notwithstanding all my crimes, I am not such a fool as to disbelieve that there is a punishment I have to dread."

Lady Somerset proposed the worthy La Casse; she acquiesced, he was sent for. "Before you, doctor," said she, "I give Lady Somerset authority to demand my cabinet, trunks, and monies, in the hands of Mr. Child, the banker—to her care I bequeath them to see my will duly performed; and let my servants be sent for." This also was done agreeably to her directions.—Lady Somerset humanely endeavoured to console her by a hope that Heaven would extend its mercy to a repentant sinner. "I know every thing you can say on this head,

head, Madam," said this strange woman; "I am well born, and was educated in a convent; but I early lost my parents, and left my country. I was born in Venice; but I have no relations, no friends,—Berthier, the low born wood-cutter, is the only man that ever touched my heart, he is therefore my heir; and the property I leave, is the only reparation I can make to him for my designs against his life. But proud, cold, and resentful, he has once already refused my bequest — the hour draws nigh when humanity must force his compliance."

Father La Casse was announced; and Lady Somerset rising to withdraw with the physician, she with earnestness repeated her desire before the priest, that her Ladyship would without delay secure her property, and dispose of it agreeable to the directions in her will. The physician of-

ferred to attend her Ladyship, which she accepted, and promised a speedy return. 3

After the confessor had been some time alone with her, Lewis was sent for;—he felt a good deal of repugnance, but being informed that she actually was past all hope of recovery, humanity impelled him to conquer his reluctance, tho' he could not disguise his emotions when he entered her chamber. Her's were too great not to disorder her weak frame,—she held out her hand, he took it, but shuddered, for it was icy cold. “This,” said she, “is the object entwined about my heart; I love him, and despise my own weakness—but 'tis now all over!—Berthier, I am dying, you are safe from love and vengeance;—forgive my attempts on your life, a life far dearer than my own, and but for that fatal beauty—thatHermine—” “Stop, Madam,” said Lewis, trembling, “stop, you have long been in an error,—the Lady Hermine
is

is Lord Somerset's destined bride; I reverence and admire her, she has been my friend and benefactress—but far, very far above any presuming hopes, such as you suppose."

"Then," said she, "I thank the blessed Virgin that she escaped my long premeditated revenge. How I traced you,—by what indefatigable researches I found her to be the person I dreaded, I have not strength to relate.—Father, to you I appeal, you must soften this stubborn heart, bend it to my wishes, and let me die in peace."

The good La Casse called upon Lewis to forgive his penitent. "And to prove, my son, that you are sincere, she demands one concession from you, as the seal to the pardon she sues for." Lewis was imexpressibly shocked,—what concession could she require?—He recollected a deception practised on Lord E. possibly this woman, so artful, so fertile in invention, had some

new

new scheme in view — he hesitated, he made no reply.

“ My good young man,” said the priest, “ rely on me ; the concession demanded to give ease to the repentant heart of this lady, will be no injury to your honour, your fortune, or happiness.—It binds you to no actions, no sentiments, that can give you disturbance ; or militate against your future plans for your success in life.” “ Father,” replied Lewis, with emotion, “ I confide in you ; Heaven knows I truly forgive every act of this lady against myself, and if in my power to give peace to her mind in an hour like this—I solemnly promise to comply with her wishes, if *no other person whatever* is implicated with myself.”—“ ’Tis enough,” said she, “ I am contented, and you cannot retract. Berthier, you are my heir ; the will made some time since in your favour is unaltered, it will be in the hands of Lady Somerset.

I shall die with the satisfaction, that thro' me you will enjoy independence.—That may lead to happiness—but no woman will love you with that frantic passion that now throbs at my quivering heart. Leave me, leave me,” cried she, strongly agitated, her eyes almost starting from their sockets,—“remember your vow, and hate not the miserable Eleanora!—Oh! Berthier, go, while I retain my senses, and take my dying wishes for your happiness.” Lewis, quite overcome, unable to speak, burst into tears, kissed her hand, put his own to his heart, and rushed from the room. She fainted, and it was some time before she recovered, when a servant came in and acquainted her that her two domestics had left her lodgings that morning, and carried with them every thing belonging to her. Eleanora was visibly shocked, “Ungrateful, deceitful wretch!—thy hour is still to come!” She no doubt apostrophised Sebastian, and it is scarce necessary to say, that

that Ann and him had taken the advantage of her unaccountable absence to rob her.— Lady Somerset and her companion having related the situation of Eleanora, and the commission entrusted to her, requested one of the clerks might attend, to hear a confirmation of the order she had received, to satisfy the house in giving up the property. She had not left them ten minutes before Sebastian appeared, with a verbal message from his lady for her cabinet,—accompanied by a very plausible story, that possibly might have succeeded, had he not been happily prevented. He was told, Lady Somerset had just left the house with the whole of his Lady's property, by her desire. The cunning Italian gave them time for no questions, but hastily cried out, "O! that is the same thing." and was out of sight in an instant.

The return of Lady Somerset gave to the dying Eleanora great satisfaction.—"I have



have succeeded," said she, with much exertion, "I have forced the proud insensible to remember Eleanora with gratitude;—to me he will owe every thing!—I exult in the idea, that *my* affection, *my* tenderness can never be forgotten!—He will regard me in spite of himself,—this is my triumph, and now I am content!" The priest, still with her, looked surprised,—“Father,” said she, “you are a good man,—it is long since I have known *good men*.—I have been vile and abandoned, but let the *base seducer, man*, be answerable for my early crimes,—on his head let them fall!—I have no more to do with life, let all leave me but the woman who attends me; to Berthier I make it my request to reward those persons to whose humanity I am so largely indebted in this house.”—She again desired to be left, and they obeyed.

“Unhappy woman!” said Lady Somerset, “all will soon be over, for the physician

cian assures me she will never see another morning dawn." "Peace be to her soul!" returned the priest, "she has confided to me her name, her quality, and her crimes. Heaven forgive her!—Berthier may without scruple enjoy her bequest, for she really has no relations or heirs that she knows of, and her name I must never reveal." To have done with this wretched woman, we shall only add, that she expired that night, more from the effects of her violent passions which inflamed her blood, than from the consequence of her wound, which in itself was not dangerous. During the course of the day, Lord Douglas paid Lord Somerset a visit, with an express wish to serve Lewis either by money or interest, or both, to make his circumstances easy and independent. His Lordship told him that Lord E. had signified the same intention in which he would also concur with much pleasure. His religion precluding him from all public offices, they proposed to purchase him an annuity.

During

During this consultation Lady Somerset and La Casse entered the room, the former accounting for her absence, and the latter declaring Lewis heir to at least twenty thousand pounds. "Twenty thousand pounds!" exclaimed Lord Douglas, "rapacious wretch! how many has she plundered to amass such a sum with all her extravagance and dissipation?" "She is on her death-bed—there be all her crimes buried for ever!" said La Casse. "All the reparation she can make is to leave her fortune to a worthy man, in whose hands it may be a blessing to others. The character she has given him entitles him to the highest esteem,—he already possesses mine as a good and great young man."

"Great!" repeated Lord Douglas.—
 "Yes, my Lord,—goodness and greatness are synonymous terms.—It is not birth or riches that makes a man *truly great*, 'tis principle, virtue, and integrity,—and such
 are

are the claims of Berthier." Lord Somerset was struck with the worthy priest's earnestness,—he had already an esteem for Lewis, and was highly pleased with the bequest of Eleanora;—and when La Casse related his former refusal of her fortune, and the precautions observed to draw him into the acceptance of an independance that scarce any other man would have hesitated to enjoy without reserve,—Lord Douglas could not refuse *his* tribute to the worth of Lewis,—“ I confess,” said he, “ this young fellow has a great mind,—pity he is not of *noble birth*.”

“ It were indeed much to be wished,” answered Lord Somerset, “ that all men of noble birth possessed such sentiments as this young peasant. — His mind will reflect honour on his situation in life, whatever it may be; whilst I fear too many persons of noble birth degrade their rank, their families, and themselves, by the perversion
of

of all their advantages, till they sink into contempt." Lord Douglas was silent—he could oppose nothing against this conclusion, and as *his character* was not famous for an obstinate adherence to opinion, Lewis, with twenty thousand pounds and such a character, gained fast upon his esteem, and caused him to remember the youth's attentions to Frederic, and the high estimation in which he was held by his son, until his forced disappearance. Whilst these occurrences passed in Portland-Place, poor Fidelity arose quite ill from want of rest, and an uneasy mind. She wished much to have gone with her father, but the offer was not made, or any enquiry after her health, tho' her pale and dejected countenance was not unobserved. She was sitting alone, oppressed by her melancholy thoughts, when Mr. Berthier was announced. The unexpected visit so overcame her, that in trying to recover to receive him, she sunk back in her chair, and burst into tears as he entered.

Lewis

Lewis scarcely knew whether he advanced or retreated. "Good Heavens! Madam, Miss Douglas, forgive this intrusion—I am shocked,—I,—I,—dear Madam, are you ill,—my Lord Douglas,—I know not what I say—forgive me." He was right, his surprise and emotions were such that he was totally at a loss whether he ought to stop or quit the room. Fidelia confused and trembling pointed to a chair, and struggling for more courage, "Pray sit, M^r. Berthier, I am ashamed of my weakness, painful retrospections.—Excuse me, I shall be better presently."

Lewis bowed, and while she was applying her handkerchief to her eyes and endeavouring for composure, his sympathetic heart recalled poor Frederic to his view, and occasioned a rush of tenderness and sorrow, that appeared mutually contagious. What dangerous moments for susceptible hearts!—Lewis never beheld Fidelia to such advantage

advantage before.—Always lovely and amiable she had been, in his eyes, from their first acquaintance,—but such feeling, such tenderness gave her a thousand additional charms ; and whilst he gazed on her with delight, he recollected her late anxiety on his account, and felt an uncommon flutter at his heart. There was always a respect, amounting to reverence, mingled with his admiration of Hermine, he seemed to adore and worship her as a superior being;—but in Fidelia there was so much feminine softness, that she stole insensibly upon the affections, and his heart overflowed with tenderness. Both were silent for some moments, until Fidelia acquired resolution to ask for her beloved friend, and also how the wretched Eleanora was.

He was glad to escape from his present ideas, and very fully detailed the events of the morning, freely avowing the painful reluctance with which he had been drawn
in

in to accept of her intended bequest. Fidelity, far from entering into the delicacy of his feelings, just at that moment felt a sensation of delight, that Berthier would be rescued from a dependence on the generosity of others, and it was the only instance in Eleanora's conduct that she could think of without detestation. "For this last act of her life, I forgive her the many sorrows she has occasioned to me.—Yes, Mr. Berthier, she has done justice to your worth, and without enquiring too nicely into the methods by which she acquired her fortune, I am persuaded, in your hands that fortune will prove a source of happiness to yourself and to others.—May Heaven extend its mercy to the dying Eleanora!" Lewis, overcome by this kindness,—emboldened by the visible transport that animated her countenance, and incapable of speaking what he felt, snatched her hand to his lips, and pressed it with a fervor that disordered her whole frame,—tho' she permitted him
to

to drop it, rather than make any attempt to draw it from him. Both were extremely confused, for the action had been the irresistible impulse of the moment, and in the next he felt shocked at his presumption.

Before either had recovered, Lord Douglas returned, and his voice roused Fidelia from her pleasing delirium;—Lewis also struggled to repress his feelings, as he rose on his Lordship's entrance. But, novices as they were in the art of dissimulation, Lord Douglas saw in a moment their mutual agitation;—he saw, and was displeased; the favourable opinion he had formed of Lewis was now shaken, he had no doubt but that he had made pretensions to his daughter, and won her heart in an indirect unhandsome manner. He returned the respectful bow of Lewis, with coldness,—“ I give you joy, Sir, of your fortune in prospect, I suppose you were eager to communicate such a very unexpected turn

turn in your affairs to Miss Douglas.”—Lewis, hurt by his looks, and insulted by his supposition, answered with some spirit, “My Lord, I thought it my duty to pay my respects to your Lordship, I had *no other view* in coming to Berkley-Square;—but when informed you were out, and Miss Douglas disengaged, I was not sensible of any impropriety in an enquiry after her health. I derive so very little pride or gratification from the “turn in my affairs,” which your Lordship alludes to, that I should not have *volunteered* a communication of the circumstance,—tho’ to the questions of Miss Douglas it would have been an affectation to have withheld events that must soon have been related to her.”

His Lordship a little abashed at his own petulance was about to speak, but Lewis, taking up his hat, added, “As I have the honour of seeing your Lordship in health, I will be guilty of no further intrusion.”

Then

Then bowing very respectfully to both, he was down the stairs before Lord Douglas knew what answer to return. On ringing the bell, he found Mr. Berthier had left the house. He was piqued,—“See,” said he, “what an effect money has already produced in this young man—what a spirit he assumed. However it *may be* premature, the wretch is not yet dead, though they say she cannot live out the day.” “I am sure,” returned Fidelia, with a *little* of the same spirit, “I am sure Mr. Berthier will never assume an improper assurance, nor have his heart corrupted by the little desired wealth that comes to him by such a woman’s bequest.” “*You are sure,*” returned his Lordship, “pray how is it that *you* are so intimately acquainted with this *uncorrupt heart*, that you dare answer for his conduct?”

She was for a moment silent and confused.—He eyed her attentively, and then added, “Fidelia, I have hitherto relied im-

plicitly on your honour and discretion, take care how you forfeit that confidence." "I never will *deserve* to lose it," answered she. "Perhaps," retorted he, "that may depend upon your own judgment, we may not calculate exactly alike. — Only remember *who you are*." "Alas! my Lord," said she, sighing, "I remember it but too well!—I know that I am a degraded, insignificant being—one who derives all her little consequence from your indulgence, not from her own rights—one who assumes a name allowed only by courtesy, and who has neither rank in society, nor claims upon your fortune."

Thunderstruck by these words, and the plaintive tone in which they were uttered, Lord Douglas threw himself on the sofa, and seemed lost in recollection; at length looking up to the weeping Fidelia,—“I fear this humility is assumed to level yourself to that young peasant. The rights I have given you, and the fortune my brother has

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has left you as his niece, place you in a very superior point of view to this Berthier.— You will do well to remember, that I am your father.” “ Dear Sir, forgive me,” interrupted Fidelia, “ I know how much I owe to your parental affection, nor will I ever disoblige or disobey you!” “ Professions are easily made,” said he, “ but your fortune is in your own disposal, and you, I suppose, think your person is equally so.” “ No, Sir,” returned she, “ however my heart may incline, I will teach it to be obedient to its first duties.—Both my person and fortune are at *your* disposal,—for to every one else is the poor Fidelia an alien.”

“ My child,” cried Lord Douglas, seeing the tears stream from her eyes, “ my dearest Fidelia, come to my arms. Many years you suffered for the faults of others, it is time you should look forward to peace and happiness—your own heart shall decide on what will best promote both. Has Berthier declared an affection for you?”

“No,” answered the trembling girl, hiding her face on his shoulder, “no, he has been uniformly respectful and distant;—but, I believe, I think, from his looks, I think he *would love me*, if he might be allowed to do it.” “*Allowed*,” repeated he, smiling, “ah! the heart rarely stays to ask leave for its sensibilities.—But we shall see, your tenderness and filial obedience have overcome my pride and my prejudice. If Berthier possesses a fortune, and the esteem of persons of rank, the world in general will allow of his claims as a gentleman, without considering his birth or occupation. We must sacrifice something to procure happiness; and pride, perhaps, is the most becoming offering we can devote to the shrine of merit.”

We cannot describe the transports of Fidelity on seeing the chief obstacle removed that seemed to impede her happiness—who in the eyes of Lewis had read a tenderness more expressive than words, and
who

who was encouraged to hope, that his honour, and a modest consciousness of his own humble birth, were the sole impediments that placed a barrier to the acknowledgement of an equal passion—no language, indeed, could pourtray her feelings at such an unexpected change. The amiable, tender Fidelia, had fixed the colour of *her* future fate, without once considering that Lewis was a stranger to the blissful change, or that as yet, he had never once opened his lips to her on the subject of love. Short had been their acquaintance, few his opportunities of conversing with her, yet her heart told her, that she was dear to him;—and happily for her peace, it is certain their last interview had stamped her image on his breast, with an impression that never after was erased from it.

At the close of this eventful day the wretched Eleanora drew her last sigh; nor would she permit any person to be with her but the woman attendant, for some hours

preceding her death.—Over her vices, and deplorable end, we shall throw a veil.

Lord Douglas and his daughter were now inseparable from the Somerset family. Berthier had no longer to oppose the pride of integrity against the proud distinction of birth.—Lord Somerset regarded him as a friend—Lady Somerset with the freedom of equality—and Hermine with the open unreserved kindness of a sister. Lord Douglas could not refuse him his esteem, nor Fidelia disguise her affection; and thus encouraged, Lewis could not suppress his wishes to obtain her heart, which *he* did not suspect had long been in his possession.

During this time letters had arrived from Lord E. and Father Francis, and his brother St. Pierre. The former hoped soon to be in town, and was exceedingly interested in the fate of Lewis. Father Francis rejoiced in the felicity of Hermine, and was anxious to hear how his *ci-devant* pupil succeeded,

succeeded, for his silence had given him some pain ; and our peasant was ashamed that since his recovery the succession of events in which he had been engaged, should have made him appear ungrateful to his first benefactor. Father St. Pierre wrote to acquaint Lewis that the infamous De Preux and his two associates had been detected at Bologna, in some very atrocious actions ;—the former had suffered death, and the others were condemned to perpetual imprisonment. The succession to the fortune of Eleanora did not elate Lewis ;—on the contrary he could not be said to enjoy it, the delicacy of Hermine's mind entered into his feelings, and she was desirous of proving *her esteem and gratitude*.

The fifteen thousand pounds secured to her by her grand-father when she was an infant, was nearly doubled by the interests. They had also heard from the good Marquis De Bressol, that he hoped to recover something handsome from the remnant of her

father's estates that were mortgaged;—and what was of much more pleasing import to Hermine, the woman supposed to be mortally wounded by the Count Montaubert, had recovered, and was long since in the hospital of penitents. This last information gave her the purest joy, that her father had not the death of that bad woman to answer for, at the great tribunal of justice; and on hearing that she was likely to have an increase of fortune, she was resolved to consult Lord and Lady Somerset in her plans for Lewis. The mutual passion felt by him and Miss Douglas, had not escaped their penetration, and from the complacency of Lord Douglas, who could not be blind to the attachment, they flattered themselves no obstacles would impede their union.

“But what shall I do for Lewis?” cried Hermine. “Will you allow me to decide the question?” asked his Lordship.—“With pleasure, and dare abide by your decision.”

decision." "Remember what you say," returned he, "I shall rely on your's. I have a few days ago heard from my steward that he had purchased a small estate of four hundred a year, which being contiguous to mine in Berkshire, makes it a desirable acquisition, as I should have the power to choose my own neighbour.—Now, my charming Hermine, what say you?—shall we name Berthier as the purchaser, and by presenting him with this estate, draw him near to us, and ensure to ourselves an agreeable neighbour?"

"We, and us," answered she, smiling, "I am talking of *my* designed present to Lewis." "Ah!" said he, "we can have but one mind between us;—whatever you give him, let me share in the pleasure of rewarding the preserver of my Hermine.—What I propose is a trifle, but I know his spirit, and I would not oppress it with a sense of obligation, that must lessen the value of our kindness." "Well," said she, "I

“I see you may be trusted with power from the delicacy of your mind, you shall therefore be left to your own discretion.”

In consequence of this consultation, Lord Somerset ventured to press his beautiful cousin for an early day, to complete his wishes, and open his prospect of future felicity. Lady Somerset so well seconded her son, that at length Hermine was brought to promise, that the birth-day of her beloved aunt, which was that day three weeks, should be the one in which she would confide her future happiness to the protection of Lord Somerset.—His transports were unbounded, and such as we cannot do justice to by description.

Whilst Lord Somerset proceeded in this business, Lord E. arrived in town. Still weak but extremely anxious to be with his friends, he had by easy stages reached Cavendish-Square, without feeling much inconvenience. Lewis flew to him on the first summons,

summons, and while his Lordship congratulated him on his acquisition of fortune, he confessed that the death of Eleanora had greatly shocked him, tho' he detested her character and dreaded her revenge.—After some other conversation, they talked of the Douglas family, and in speaking of Fidelia, his Lordship smiled, “You are interested, Berthier,—has your heart changed its object?” “No, my Lord,” answered he, a little confused, “I still admire and reverence Lady Hermine, she will soon be united to the deserving Lord Somerset,—but I confess that for Miss Douglas I feel more tenderness, and, in short, not that awe which always *repressed* my presumptive passion for another object.” “Very well defined,” returned his Lordship, “I am impatient to see both ladies.” Lord Somerset was announced, when Lord E. engaged to dine with the family party on the following day.

Previous to the dinner hour, Lord Somerset had some conversation with Lord Douglas, and by his happy persuasion obtained for Lewis permission to address Fidelia; and the liberty of introducing him to her in the character of a lover. This in the course of the day he sought an opportunity to perform, in the presence of Hermine, whose warm congratulations gave them a degree of confidence that overcame their first confusion, and made both inexpressibly happy. Lord E. was exceedingly charmed with both the ladies, who were almost equally lovely, tho' in a different style of beauty. "I shall certainly," said he, "look round among *your acquaintance*, to find a female companion for myself, that in the character of "Benedict the married man," I may be admitted as a worthy member into your charming society. I have paid pretty dearly for the experience that has taught me the fallacy of expecting pleasure, much less happiness, in the frivolous pursuits of fashionable follies;—and
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the air of content, cheerfulness, and delight which pervades every countenance in this happy circle, well assures me, that real felicity can only be found in the heartfelt joys of domestic life, supported by love and harmony, by virtue and mutual confidence."

Lord Douglas applauded his early secession from vice and dissipation, adding, that he had no doubt of his perseverance in his present good purposes, whilst he derived pleasure from the society of worthy people.

Within a few days after the public permission granted to Lewis to address Fidelia, Hermine presented to him the writings of the estate purchased in his name by Lord Somerset. That he should decline a present so noble, which he did not want, was very natural;—but how impossible was it for him to persist in any point against the judgment and persuasion of Hermine!—"We wish to draw you close to ourselves," said she, "this trifle is but a small tribute to gratitude.—What had been the dreadful

ful fate of Herinine, had not your humanity interposed to soften the last hours of an expiring parent, and preserve his child from sinking under her sorrows?—O! Berthier, the remembrance will dwell in my bosom for ever,—and to refuse me the pleasure of adding to *your comforts*, will be an unjustifiable pride, and brand me with the hateful sin of ingratitude, which of all others I most detest!” The heart of Lewis beat high with every sentiment of respect, admiration, and grateful love.—“Ah! Madam,” he replied, “I am your creature, I owe every thing to you, do with me as you please.—Nothing can add to the reverence and gratitude that glows in my heart, and will make me to the last moment of my life, emulous to deserve your esteem.” “Now,” said she, “you have given additional happiness to me, for which I thank you, my good friend.—Lord Somerset will talk to you about settlements, and such necessary matters, previous to your marriage with our dear Fidelia.” “By no means, Madam,” answered

answered he, "let me be consulted,—I am entirely ignorant of ~~such~~ business, I beg my Lord will settle every thing to his own judgment, only remembering what *I* have been, and what I am now, raised from the meanest situation by the bounty and generosity of noble minds, to a distinguished place in society, as much above my deserts as superior to my vainest hopes.—Let every thing be settled for the happiness and independence of your amiable friend, that is *all* I have to request." Lord Somerset made no difficulty in accepting the trust, and every preliminary was soon concluded.

On that day so anxiously looked for by Lord Somerset, himself and Lewis were united to two of the most amiable of women. Our peasant, arrived at the summit of happiness, never forgot the humble state from which he had been drawn by his revered benefactor; but preserved that modest dignity which disarmed the malignancy of envious detractors, and procured him the
friendly

friendly regard of all who knew him. No language can do justice to the heartfelt pleasure enjoyed by the good old Father Francis, when informed that his pupil had justified his hopes, and was respectable and happy.

Hermine and Fidelia, who gratefully loved the worthy man, proposed, in the following spring to make a visit to the Abbey of St. Hubert. Lewis anticipated the delight of gratifying a local attachment to the peaceful cottage of his revered parents, to the ruined castle, to the Forest of Ardenne,—and, above all, of throwing himself into the arms of his reverend benefactor, who had so kindly drawn him from a humble occupation, and fashioned his mind to truth and integrity;—and to whose pious care the Peasant of Ardenne Forest was indebted for his present rank in society, for happiness, and for self-approbation.

F I N I S.

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